

"Now that's a mighty queer noise." Jerry Foster told himself. He dropped the pack from his shoulders and leaned closer to the canyon rim.

Miles behind him was the last beaten trail: Jerry wanted peace and solitude and quiet. And now the quiet of the silent mountains was disturbed.

From far below came a steady, muffled roar. Faint it was, and distant, but peculiar in its unvarying, unceasing rush.

"Not water," Jerry concluded; "not enough down there. Sounds like—like a wind—like a wind that can't quit.

"Oh well—" He shrugged his shoulders and slipped into the straps of his pack. Then he went back again to the granite ledge. "I wonder if there's a way down," he said.

There was, but it took all of Jerry's strength to see him safely through. On a fan-shaped talus of spreading boulders he stopped. There was a

limestone wall beyond. And at its base, from a crevice that was almost a cave, came a furious rush of air and steam.

It touched him lightly a hundred feet away, and he threw himself flat to escape the hot blast. Endlessly it came, with its soft, rushing roar, a ceaseless, scorching blast from the cold rocks.

"That's almighty funny," mused Foster, and sniffed the air. There was no odor.

"And is it hot!" he said. "Nothing like that in my geology book. And what is beyond? Looks like concrete work, as if someone had plastered up the cave." He picked his way quickly across the rock slope.

It was hard going. Below him the rocks and dirt went steep to the canyon floor. At its foot the blast swept diagonally over the slope. He must see what lay beyond....

"Curious," he thought; "curious if that is nature's

work—and a lot more so if it isn't."

A rock rolled beneath his feet. Another! He scrambled and fought desperately for foothold in the slipping earth. Then, rolling and clawing, he rode helpless on the slide straight toward the mysterious blast. He felt it envelop him, hot and strangling. His lungs were dry and burning ... the blazing sun faded from the rocks ... the world was dark....

Darkness was still about him when he awoke. But it was cool; the air was sweet on his lips. And it was not entirely dark.

He turned his head. He was in a room. On a rough-hewn table a candle was burning. Its light cast flickering shadows on walls of stone. Rumbling in his ears was the sound of the blast that had overwhelmed him. It echoed, seemingly, from far back in the stone cliff.

Jerry made a move to sit up. He found that his hands and feet were tied, his body bound to the rough board bed.

At the sound of his stirring, a figure came out from the farther shadow. It was that of a man. Jerry looked at him in silence. He was tall, his thin erectness making him seem abnormal in the low room. The lean face was unshaven, and from under a thatch of black hair a pair of deep-set eyes stared penetratingly at the figure on the rude bed.

"Well," asked Jerry, at length, "what's the big idea?"

There was no reply. Only the intent, staring eyes.

"You got me out of that man-trap of yours," Jerry continued. "You saved my life."

The tall man finally spoke. "Yes, I saved your life. You missed the hottest part of the exhaust. I pumped you full of oxygen."

"Then why tie me up like this?" Jerry Foster was frankly puzzled.

"You are lucky to be alive. Spies are not always allowed—" He interrupted himself abruptly. "You are a

reporter," he stated.

"Wrong," said Jerry Foster.

"Who sent you?"

"Nobody sent me. I heard the noise of your infernal blast-furnace and came down to have a look."

"Who sent you?" repeated the man. "Goodwin? The Stillwater crowd? Who was it?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," protested Jerry. "I don't know who your Goodwin or Stillwater people are. I don't know who you are—I don't give a damn. Take these ropes off and cut out the melodrama. I'll go on my way, and I don't care if I never see you again."

"That's a lie." The tall figure leaned over to shake a bony fist. "You'd report to Goodwin. He stole my last invention. He'll not get this."

Jerry considered the wild figure carefully. "He's a

nut," he thought. When he spoke, his voice was controlled.

"Now, see here," he said: "I don't know anything about this. I'm Jerry Foster, live in San Francisco—"

"So does Goodwin."

"Confound you and your Goodwin! So do a million other people live there! I'm getting away from there; I'm heading into the hills for a short vacation. All I want is to get away from the world. I'm looking for a little peace and quiet."

The thin man interrupted with a harsh laugh.

"Come here spying," he said, "and tell me you want to get away from the world." Again he laughed shrilly.

"And I am going to be your little fairy godmother. I wish you were Goodwin himself! I wish I had him here. But you'll get your wish—you'll get your wish. You'll leave the world, you shall, indeed."

He rocked back and forth with appreciation of his humor.

"Didn't know I was all ready to leave, did you? All packed and ready to go. Supplies all stowed away; enough energy stored to carry me millions of miles. Or maybe you did know—maybe there are others coming...." He hurried across the room to open a heavy door of split logs in the rock wall.

"I'll fool them all this time," he said; "and you'll never go back to tell them." The door closed behind him.

"Crazy as a bed-bug," Jerry told himself. He strained frantically at the ropes that bound him. "Looks bad for me: the old bird said I'd never go back. Well, what if I die now ... or six months from now? Though I know that doctor was wrong."

He tried to accept his fate philosophically, but the will to live was strong. And one of his wrists felt looser in its bonds.

Across the room his pack lay on the floor, and in it

was a heavy forty-five. If he could get the pistol.... A knot pulled loose under his twisting fingers. One hand was free. He worked feverishly at the other wrist.

The ropes were suddenly loose. He pulled himself to his feet, took a moment to regain control of cramped muscles, then flung himself at the pack. When the heavy door opened he was behind it, his pistol in his hand.

There was no struggle: the lanky figure showed no maniacal fury. Instead, the man did a surprising thing. He sank weakly upon the rough bunk where Jerry had lain, his face buried in his thin hands.

"I should have let you die," he said slowly, hopelessly. "I should have let you die. But I couldn't do that.... And now you'll steal my invention for Goodwin."

Jerry was as exasperated as he was amazed.

"I told you," he almost shouted. "I never knew anyone named Goodwin! I don't care a hoot about your invention. And as for letting me die—why didn't you?"

That's a puzzle: you were about to kill me, anyway."

"No," said the other patiently. "I wasn't going to kill you."

"You said I'd never go back."

"I was going to take you with me."

"Take me where?"

"To the moon," said the drooping figure.

Jerry Foster stared, open-mouthed. The pistol lagged in his limp hand. "To the moon!" he gasped.

Then: "See here," he said firmly. "I've got you where I want you."—he held the pistol steady—"and now I'm going to learn what's back of this. I think you are crazy, absolutely crazy. But, tell me, who are you? What do you think you're doing? What was the meaning of that roaring blast?"

The man looked up. "You don't know?" he asked

eagerly. "You really don't?"

"No," said Jerry; "but I'm going to find out."

"Yes," the other agreed. "Yes, you can, now that you've got the upper-hand. I guess I was half crazy when I thought I had been spied out. But I'll tell you."

He sat erect. "I am Thomas J. Winslow," he said, and made the statement as if it were an explanation in itself.

"Well," said Jerry, "that's no burst of illumination to my ignorance. Come again."

The man called Winslow was ready—anxious—to talk.

"I am an inventor. I have made millions of dollars"—Jerry looked at the disheveled apparel of the speaker and smiled—"for other people. The Stillwater syndicate stole my valveless motor. Then I developed my television set. Goodwin beat me out of that: he will have it on the market inside of a year. I swore they should never profit by this, my greatest invention."

Jerry was impressed in spite of himself by the man's earnest simplicity.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I've broken the atom," said Winslow. "First tore the atoms of hydrogen and oxygen apart—dissociated them in the molecule of water—and have resolved them into their energy components. That's what you heard—the reaction. It is self-sustaining, exothermic. That hot blast carried off the heat of my retort."

Winslow rose from the bunk. Gone was his listless despondency.

"Put up that gun," he said: "you don't need it now. I think we understand each other better than we did." He crossed with quick strides to the door leading into the cliff.

"Come with me," he told Foster. "I am leaving to-day. You will not stop me. But before I go I will show you something no other man than myself has ever seen."

He led the way through the doorway. There was another room beyond, Jerry saw. It was a cave. Plainly Winslow had taken these caves in the rocks and had made of them a laboratory.

A lantern gave scant illumination: Jerry made out a small electric generator, and that was all. He felt a keen disappointment. Somehow this thin-faced man had communicated to him something of his own belief, his own earnestness.

"What kind of a laboratory do you call this?" he demanded. But the other was busy.

In the wall an opening had been closed with a small iron door, with cement around it. Winslow opened it and reached through. He was evidently adjusting something.

The little dynamo began to hum. There was a crackling hiss from beyond the iron doorway. The opening was flooded with a clear blue light.

Then the roar began. It was tremendous, deafening,

in the echoing cave.

"You may look now," said Winslow, and stood aside.

Jerry peered through. There was another cave beyond. In it was a small metal cylinder, a retort of some kind. The blue light came from a crooked bulb beyond. The retort itself was white-hot, despite a stream of water flowing upon it. A cloud of steam drove continuously out and up through a crevice in the rocks.

The water flowed steadily from some subterranean stream in the limestone formation. It was diverted for its cooling purposes, but a portion also flowed continuously into the retort. Jerry's eyes found this, and he could see nothing else. For, before his eyes, the impossible was occurring.

The retort was small, a couple of feet in diameter. It had no discharge pipes, could hold but a few gallons. Yet into it, in a steady stream, flowed the icy water. Gallons, hundreds of gallons, flowing and flowing, endlessly, into a reservoir which could never hold it.

The inventor watched Foster with complacent satisfaction.

"Where does it go?" Jerry asked incredulously.

"Into nothingness," was the reply. "Or nearly that!"

"See?" He held up a flask of pale green liquid. "And this," he added, exhibiting another that was colorless.

"I have worked here for many months. I have converted thousands of thousands of gallons of water. It has flowed into that retort, never to return. I have gathered this, the product, a few drops at a time.

"The protons and the electrons," he explained, "are re-formed. They are static now, unmoving. Call this what you will—energy or matter—they are one and the same."

"Still," said Jerry, gropingly, "what has all that to do with the moon? You said you were going there."

"Yes," agreed the inventor. I am going, and this is the

driving force to carry me there. I pass a certain electric current through these two liquids. I carry the wires to two heavy electrodes. Between them resolution of matter occurs. The current carries these two components to again combine them and form what we call matter, the gases hydrogen and oxygen.

"Do I need to tell you of the constant, ceaseless and tremendous explosion that follows?

"But enough of this! You said I was crazy. I gave you a few bad hours. I have shown you this much as a measure of recompense. You have seen what no other man has ever seen. It is enough."

He motioned Foster through the door. The roaring ceased. The inventor returned shortly, the two flasks of liquid in his hands. He transferred both to two metal containers that were ready for the precious load. He carried them with the utmost care as he went out of doors.

Once he returned, and Jerry knew by the crashes from the inner room that the laboratory work was

indeed done. There would be nothing left to tell the secret to whomever might come.

He followed Winslow outside, trailing him toward a wooded knoll. There was a clearing among the trees. And in it, hidden from all sides, his eyes found another curious sight.

On the ground rested a dirigible in miniature. Still, it was small, he reasoned, only by comparison with its monster prototype: actually it was a sizable cylinder of aluminum that shone brightly in the sun. It was bluntly rounded at the ends. There were heavy windows, open exhaust ports, a door in the side, pierced through thick walls. Winslow vanished within, while Jerry watched in pitying wonder.

Despite its size, it was a toy, an absurd and pitiful toy. Real genius and lunacy had many an over-lapping line, Jerry reflected as he approached to look inside. But he found Winslow in a room surrounded by a network of curving, latticed struts. The machine was no makeshift of a demented builder: it was a beautiful bit of construction that Jerry Foster examined.

"How did you ever get it here?" he marveled. "What you had in the cave you could pack in, but this—all these parts—castings—cases of supplies—"

The inventor did not even turn. He was busy with some final adjustments.

"Flew it in," he said shortly. "Built it in an old shop I owned out near Oakland."

"And it flew?" Jerry was still incredulous.

"Certainly it flew! On a drop or less of the liquids you saw." He pointed to a heavy casting at the center of the machine. There were braces tying it strongly to the entire structure, braces designed to receive and transmit a tremendous thrust.

"This is the generator. Blast expelled through the big exhaust at the stern. These smaller exhausts go above and below—right and left at the bow. Perfect control!"

"And you flew it here!" Jerry was still trying to grasp that incontrovertible fact. "And you were going to

take me to the moon, you said."

He looked above him where a pale, silvery segment showed dimly in the sky. "But why the moon?" he questioned. "Even granting that this will fly through space...."

"It will," the other interrupted. "I tried it. Went up to better than fifty miles."

Jerry Foster took a minute to grasp that statement, then continued: "Granting that, why go to the moon? There is nothing there, no air to speak of, no water! It's all known."

The inventor turned to face the younger man in the doorway.

"There is *nothing* known," he stated. "The modern telescopes reach out a million light years into space. But the one place they have never seen—can never see—is less than two hundred and fifty thousand miles away. The moon, as of course you know, always keeps the same side toward us. The other side of the

moon has never been seen.

"Listen," he said, and his deep-set eyes were afire with an intense emotion. "The moon is no tiny satellite; it is a sister planet. It is whirled on the end of a rope (we call it gravitation), swung around and around the earth. How could there be water or anything fluid on this side? It is all thrown to the other side by the centrifugal force. Who knows what life is there? No one—no one! I am going to find out."

Jerry Foster was silent. He was thinking hard. He looked about him at the clean hills, the trees, the world he knew. And he was weighing the secure life he knew against a great adventure.

He took one long breath of the clear air as one who looks his last at a familiar scene. He exhaled slowly. But he stepped firmly into the machine.

"Winslow," he said, "have you any rope handy?"

The inventor was annoyed. "Why, yes, I guess so. Why? What do you want of it?"

"I want you to tie me up again," said Jerry Foster. "I want you to carry me off as you planned. I want to go with you."

The tall man stared at the quiet, determined face before him. Slowly his own strained features smoothed into kindly lines. He grasped tight at Jerry's hand.

"I was dreading that part of it," he confessed slowly: "going alone. It would have been lonely—out there...."

The shining cylinder of aluminum alloy was hurtling through space. No longer was it a ship of the air; it had thrown itself far beyond that thin gaseous envelope surrounding the earth; out into the black and empty depths that lay beyond. And in it were two men, each reacting in his own way to an adventure incredible. One was deep in the computation of astronomical data; the other athrill with a quivering, nerve-shaking joy that was almost breath-taking.

A metal grating that had formed the rear wall of their cabin was now the floor. Winslow had thrown the ship

into a vertical climb that made of their machine a projectile shooting straight out from the earth. Gravitation held them now to the grating floor. And, stronger even than the earth-pull, was the constant acceleration of motion that made their weight doubled again and again.

The inventor moved ponderously, with leaden limbs, to take sights from the windows above, to consult his maps of the sky, check and re-check his figures. But Jerry had eyes only for the earth they had left.

Flat on the grating he lay, his eyes over a thick glass in a proturbance of the shell that allowed him to stare and stare at what lay directly below. He watched the familiar things of earth vanish in fleecy clouds; through them there formed the great ball, where oceans and continents drew slowly into focus.

And now he was filled with a sense of great solitude. The world, in its old, familiar companionship, was gone—probably forever. The earth—*his* earth—*his* world—that place of vast distances on land and on sea, of lofty mountain ranges and heaving oceans, of

cities, countries, continents—was become but a toy. A plaything from the nursery of some baby god, hanging so quiet in space he could almost reach and take it in his hands.

Beyond it the sun was blaring, a hard outlined disc in the black sky. Its rays made shining brilliance of a polar ice-cap.

Jerry Foster closed his eyes and drew back from the glass. Again he was aware of the generator, whose endless roar reverberated in their compartment. A smaller but similar apparatus was operating on one of the liquids from the inventor's laboratory to generate oxygen and release it inside the room. An escape valve had been set to maintain one atmosphere of pressure about them. Water dripped from a condenser where both gases were formed to burn into water vapor and cool to liquid form.

One of the windows below admitted a shaft of direct sunlight; it illumined their room with a faint glow. It would never cease, Jerry knew. They were in a place of eternal sunshine, yet a realm of an endless night.

Above him, as Jerry raised his head, the windows framed nothing but utter blackness, save where some brilliant point marked the presence of a star. He missed the soft diffusion of light that makes daylight on earth. Here was only the one straight beam that entered one window to make a circle of light on the opposite wall.

Jerry looked from a window of heavy glass at the side. This had been the bottom of their ship when they left. And he found in the heavens the object of their quest. Clear-cut and golden was half the circle; the rest glowed faintly in the airless void. He tried to realize the bewildering fact—the moon, this great globe that he saw, was rushing, as were they, to their trysting-place in space.

Jerry stared until his eyes were aching. His mind refused to take hold upon the truth he knew was true. He was suddenly tired, heavy with weariness that was an aftermath of his emotional turmoil. He let his heavy body relax where some blankets had piled themselves upon the grated floor. The roar of the generator faded into far silence as he slipped into that

strange spaceless realm that men call sleep.

The human mind is marvelous in its power of adjustment, its adaptability to the new and the strange. The unbelievable is so soon the commonplace. Jerry Foster was to sleep more than once in this tiny new world of Winslow's creating, this diminutive meteor, inside which they lived and moved and thought and talked. The fact of their new existence soon ceased as a topic of wonder.

They alternated in their rest. And they counted the passage of time by the hours their watches marked, then divided these hours into days out there where there were no days. Seven of them had passed when the hour came that Winslow chose for checking their speed.

They were driving directly toward the moon, which was assuming proportions like those of earth. The pilot admitted a portion of the blast to a bow port, and the globe ahead of them gradually swung off. The pilot was reversing their position in space to bring the powerful blast of their stern exhaust toward the

moon, so as to resist somewhat its increasing pull.

Now their stern windows showed the approaching globe. It was slowly expanding. They were falling toward it. The inventor moved a rheostat, and from behind them the stern blast rose to a tremendous roar. The deceleration held them with unbearable weight to the rear of the cabin.

No thought now for the shining earth, yellow and brilliant in the velvet sky above. Jerry Foster watched through the slow hours as the globe beneath them enlarged and expanded in ever-increasing slowness. Slowly their falling motion slackened as they cushioned against the terrific thrust of the exhaust below.

The globe ceased to grow and held constant. Winslow cut the exhaust to a gentler blast. They were definitely within the moon's gravitational field; their last hold upon the earth was severed. The great globe was revolving beneath them.

"How about it?" Foster asked breathlessly. "It doesn't

revolve like that—not the moon!"

"We have approached from the earth side," said the other, "but we have overshot it. Say that the moon is revolving, or say that we are swinging about it in an orbit of our own—it is all the same thing."

"And soon," he added slowly, "we shall see...." He faltered and his lips trembled and refused to frame the words of a dream that was coming true. "We shall see ... the lost side of the moon. What will it be ... what—will—it—be...?"

To Foster the whole experience had now the unreality of a dream. He could not bring himself into mental focus. His thoughts were blurred, his emotions dead.

They were approaching the moon, he told himself. It was the moon that was there below them, slowly enlarging now, as their own earth had hung below them, but dwindling, when they left.

"The moon!" he told himself over and over. "The moon—it is real!" But the numbness in his brain would not

be shaken off.

His voice, when he spoke, was casual. He might have been speaking of any commonplace—a ball-game, or a good show.

"The sun is coming from my right," he said. "We are going around toward the dark side of the moon. Shall you land there?"

Winslow shook his head. "Wait," he said, "and watch."

Jerry returned to his circle of glass.

There was a shading of light on the surface below him. From the right the sun's brilliance threw black shadows and bright beams transversely over a wilderness of volcanic waste. And beyond, where the rays could not reach, was a greater desolation of darkness, its blackness relieved only by a dim light. He realized with a start of amazement that the dim light he saw was that of their own earth far above: it was lighting their approach to this sister orb.

Their side-motion was swift as they drew nearer. Another hour and more, and they were drawing toward an expanse of utter darkness. The earth-light was fading where they passed. They were approaching, in very fact, the other side of the moon.

What was below? What mysteries awaited them? He shivered, despite the warmth of the generator, cherry-red, that heated the snug cabin; shivered with unformed thoughts of unknown terrors. But he forced his voice to calm steadiness when he repeated his question to Winslow.

"Must we land there?" he asked. "In the dark?"

The inventor was piloting his ship with ceaseless concentration. Their falling speed was checked; they were close enough so that the whistling of air was heard merging with the thunder of their exhaust. He moved the rheostat under his hand, and the thunder slackened.

"No," he said. "You are forgetting your astronomy. This 'other side' is subject to the same conditions as

the near side. The sun shines on them alike, but alternately. We are rounding the limb away from the sun. We find, as you see, a darkness that is absolute except for the light of the stars. Here the earth never shines, and the sun only during the lunar day. But the sun is creeping down this other side. Their day, equal to fifteen of our days, is beginning. We shall come into the light again. I am checking our motion across the surface. We shall land, when it seems best, later on. There will be light."

The thin strong hands of the pilot played over the current and valve controls. Their ship slowly swung and dipped to a horizontal position. A blast from below held them off from the moon. A bow port was roaring as their speed slowly decreased.

Minutes merged endlessly into long hours as Jerry's eager eyes strained to detect some definite form on the surface beneath. Dimly a glow appeared far ahead; slowly the darkness faded. They were moving ahead, but their wild speed was checked. And slowly the new earth below took on outline and form as the sun's glow crept over it.

What would the light disclose? His mind held irrationally to thoughts his reason would have condemned. He found himself watching for people, for houses, lights gleaming from windows. This, in a region of cold that approached the absolute zero. The reality came as a shock.

The first rays that crept into vision were silvery fingers of light. They reflected up to the heights in glittering brilliance. They gathered and merged as the ship drove on toward the sunrise, and they showed to the watching eyes a wondrous, a marvelous world. A world that was snowbound, weighted and blanketed with a mantle of white.

To Jerry the truth came as a crushing, a horrible blow. He turned slowly to look at his companion; to look and be startled anew by the happiness depicted on the lean face.

"I knew it," the pilot was saying. "I always knew it. But now—now...." He was speechless with joy.

"It's terrible!" said Foster. He almost resented the

other's elation. "It's a hell! Just a frozen hell of desolation."

"Man—man!" was the response, "can't you see? Look! The whiteness we see is snow, a snow of carbon dioxide. The cold is beyond guessing. But the clear places—the vast fields—it's ice, man, it's ice!"

"Horrible!" Jerry shuddered.

"Beautiful," said the other. "Marvellous! Think, think what that means. It means water in the hot lunar day. It means vapor and clouds in the sky. It means that where that is there is air—life, perhaps. God alone knows all that it means. And we, too, shall know...."

The ship settled slowly to the surface of the new world. Black blobs of shadow become distinct craters; volcanoes rose slowly to meet them, to drift aside and rise above as they sank to the floor of a valley. They came to rest upon a rocky floor.

On all sides their windows showed a waste of torn and twisted rock. Volcanic mountains towered to the

heights, their sides streaked with masses of lava, frozen to stillness these countless years from its molten state. The rising sun, its movement imperceptible, cast long slanting rays between the peaks. It lighted a ghostly world, white with thick hoar-frost of solid carbon dioxide. A silent world, locked in the stillness of cold near the absolute zero. Not a breath of air stirred; no flurry of snow gave semblance of life to the scene. Their generator was stillen, and the silence, after the endless roaring of endless days, was overpowering.

But Winslow pointed exultantly from one window, where an icy expanse could be seen. "That will be water," he said; "water, when the sun has risen."

He turned on the generator for warmth. The cold was striking through the thick insulated walls. They sat silent, peering out upon that boundless desolation, upon a world's breathless nakedness, exposed for the first time in all eternity to human eyes.

Jerry's mind was searching for some means of expression, but the words would not come. There

were neither words nor coherent thoughts to give vent to the emotions that surged within him.

Their watches showed the passage of nearly two earth days before they dared venture forth. They watched the white mantle of frost vanish into gas. From the darkness that they called "west," winds rushed shriekingly into the sunrise.

"Convection currents," Winslow explained; "off under the sun. In the direct rays the heat grows intense; the air rises. This is rushing in to fill the void. It will serve our ends, too. It will churn the air into a mixture we can breathe, dispel the thick layer of CO₂ that must have formed close to the ground."

More hours, and the icy sheet was melting. A film of water rippled in the gusts of wind. Winslow opened the release valve that would permit the escape of air from their chamber, equalizing the pressures within and without. The air hissed through the valve, and he closed it so the escape was gradual.

"We must exercise," he told Jerry. "We will

decompress slowly, like divers coming up from deep-sea work. But watch yourself," he warned.

"Remember you are six times as strong as you were on the earth. Don't jump through the roof."

The valve had ceased to hiss when Winslow opened it wide. The air in their cabin was thin; their lungs labored heavily at first. Jerry felt as he had felt more than once at some great elevation on earth. But they lived, and they could breathe, and they were about to do what never man had done—to set foot on this place men called the unknown side of the moon.

Earth habits were strong: Jerry brought his pistol and a hunting knife out of his pack and hung them at his belt, as the inventor opened the door and sniffed cautiously of the air.

Jerry Foster's blood was racing; the air was cold on his face as he rushed out. But it brought to his nostrils odors strange and yet strangely familiar. He was oddly light-headed, irresponsible as a child as he shouted and danced and threw himself high in the air, to laugh childishly at the pure pleasure of his light

landing.

The sun made long shadows of two ludicrous figures that went leaping and racing across the rocks. Their strength was prodigious, and they were filled with an upwelling joy of living and the combined urge of an eternity of spring-times. The very air tingled with life; there was overpowering intoxication in this potent, exhilarating breath from a world new-born.

The ground that they crossed so recklessly was a vast honeycomb of caves. Between the rocks the soil was soft with the waters from melting ice, and the men laughed as they floundered at times in the oozing mud. Beyond was a lake, and it was blue with a depth of color that was almost black, a reflection of the deep, velvet blackness of the sky overhead. And beyond that was the sloping side of an extinct volcano.

"Up—up!" Jerry shouted. "From up there we will see the whole world—the whole moon!" He laughed as he repeated the exultant phrase: "The moon—the whole moon!"

Despite their strength which carried them in wild bounds across impassable chasms, their laboring lungs checked them in the ascent. The joyous inebriation was wearing off. Winslow met his companion's eyes sheepishly as they stopped where a sheer cliff of basalt above caught and held the warmth of the sun's rays. Behind them it rose a straight hundred feet, and before stretched a vast panorama. The sun was mounting now in the sky. It brought into strong relief the welter of volcanic waste that extended in bold detail through the clear air far out to the horizon, where, misty and dim, the first vaporous clouds were forming from the steaming earth.

And as they watched, the depressing bareness and emptiness of that gray-black expanse was changing. Far to the east a pink flush was spreading on the hills. It wavered and flowed, and it changed, as they watched, to deep areas of orange and red. The delicate pink swept in waves over valleys and hills, a vast kaleidoscopic coloration that rioted over a strange world.

In silence it spilled into the valley below. The slope they had traversed was radiant with color.

At their feet the ground was in motion: it heaved and rolled in countless places. Rounded shapes in myriads were emerging. Plants—mushroom growths—poured up from the earth to drink in the sunshine of their brief summer. They burst the earth to show unfolding leaves or blunted, rounding heads, that grew before the men's incredulous eyes.

Winslow was the first to recover from the stupefying beauty of the spectacle.

"The machine!" he gasped. "Back to the ship! We'll be swamped, overwhelmed...." He rushed madly back down the slope.

Jerry was beside him, a revulsion of feeling driving him to frantic efforts. The piercing beauty that had enthralled him has become a thing of terror. The soft, pulpy, growing things that crushed beneath his feet were a menace in their lust for life.

They were a mile and more from the machine. Could they ever find it, Jerry wondered. The whole landscape was changed; bare rocks were half-hidden now under clinging, creeping vines. Only the sun remained as a guide. They must go toward the sun and a little north.

He followed Winslow, who was circling a huge area of weird growths that already were waist high. They leaped across a gaping chasm and fought their way over a low hill, rank with vegetation, only to be confronted by a maze of great stalks—stalks that sprouted as they watched, dismayed, and threw out grotesque and awkward branches.

They made one futile effort to force their way, but the trunks, though pliant, were unyielding. To attempt to find their way through the labyrinth was folly.

"We've got to keep on trying," said Jerry Foster.

"We've got to get back, or...."

Winslow, as the look in his eyes showed, needed no ending to that sentence. There was the summer of a

lunar day ahead; the inventor did not need to be told of the scorching, broiling heat that would wither the land when the sun struck from straight overhead. And in their ship was food and water and a means of transport to the cooler heights above.

It was Jerry who took charge of the situation. Here was a prodigious laboratory in which Winslow's science was useless, but in fighting with nature—even nature in as weird and terrifying a mood as this—Jerry felt himself not entirely incompetent.

He looked about him. It had been but an hour since they watched the first onslaught of this life that engulfed them. And now they were cut off. Through an opening, where bare rocks made a rift in the vegetation, he saw again the high ground where they had stood. There was more rock there on the volcanic slope: the growing things were in clumps—*islands*, rather than continents of rank growth.

"We must go back," he told Winslow, "and climb while we can. Get to the high ground, take bearings on the place where we left the ship. We'll look over the

ground and figure some way to get there."

Winslow nodded. He was plainly bewildered, lost in the new jungle. He followed Jerry, who bounded across a crevice in the earth. The ground was rotten with the honeycomb of caves and cracks.

Jerry forced his way through and over a rock heap, where the thick trunks of nightmare trees were spaced farther apart. There was an opening ahead; he started forward, then stopped abruptly and motioned the other to silence.

From beyond there came sounds. There was rending of soft, pliant tissue. The sound came through the thin air from a grove up ahead, where big plants were waving, though the wind had long since ceased. To their ears came a snoring, blubbering snuffle. A stone was dislodged, to come bounding toward them from the hillside; the soft plants were flattened before it. The men cowered in the shelter of a giant fungus.

Beyond the rocks, above the mottled reds and yellows of the grotesque trees, a head appeared. It waved at

the end of a long, leathery neck. All mouth, it seemed to the watchers, as they saw a pair of short forelegs pull the succulent tops of the giant growth into a capacious maw. Below, there was visible a part of a gigantic, grayish body. It was crashing down toward them, eating greedily as it came.

"Back," said Jerry softly. "Go back to that cave. We will hide there in some crack in the ground."

They picked their way noiselessly over the rocks. The cave they had crossed offered a refuge from the beast. It went slantingly down into the ground, a great tunnel, deep in the rock. They dropped into the opening and started forward, only to recoil at the fetid stench that assailed their nostrils.

"A bear pit," gasped Jerry. "Great Heavens! What a smell!"

They stopped, dismayed. Far below them in the bowels of some subterranean passage was the crashing of loose stone; a scrambling and scratching of great claws came echoing to them. They leaped

madly for the outer air.

"Over here," Jerry directed, and led the way, crouching, to the concealment of great stalks and vine-covered rocks. He pointed toward the open ground where they had been a few moments before. The tree-eater was out in full view. Its flabby, barrel-like body was squatted like that of some unearthly, giant toad, on massive hind legs. It sat erect, its forelegs hung in air, as a hoarse, snarling cry came from the cave. The great head, perched on the long leathery neck, waved from side to side.

The noise from the cave ceased. The rift in the earth was in plain sight from where they cowered, and the eyes of the men were upon it. One instant it was empty; the next, in uncanny silence, it was filled with huge hideousness—an enormous, crouching beast.

It was black, a dull leathery black. Its thick, hairless hide hung in creases and folds on a gaunt frame. Shorter than the tree-eater, it was still a thing of mammoth ugliness. Its hind legs were powerful and armed with claws that curved deep into the earth; its

front legs displayed the same fearful weapons. A thick, heavy tail slashed forward and back over the ground. And from this to the grinning, heavy-toothed jaws and beady eyes where the long neck ended in a warty head, it was an incarnation of pitiless ferocity.

Was the scent of the hidden, shuddering men in its red nostrils? It forgot them at the sight of the beast in the clearing. The snarling cry echoed hideously in the thin air as the frightful body came erect with neck extended, jaws open and dripping. It hurled itself through the air in one terrific leap.

Had there been any lingering hope in the minds of the men that they had no carnivores to deal with, the ensuing struggle ended it. The attacker tore great masses of living flesh from the struggling, screaming body. The first cumbersome brute was helpless before its destroyer.

Jerry was trembling and sick at the sight, but he grasped his companion's arm and drew him after as he slipped quietly away.

"To the high ground," he whispered. "It's our only hope. Perhaps we can fight them off there—find some steep rock we can climb." They worked their way desperately through the rubbery, obstructing growth.

At the foot of the hill there was better going; the bare rock gave winding and twisting passage to the heights. They could have leaped over the stunted growths here, could have raced frantically for the high ground, but they dared not. To leap up into view of those fierce, searching eyes! It was unthinkable. They crouched low as they darted from their concealment to new shelter, and crawled behind rocks when open ground must be crossed.

They had dared regain hope when again the paralyzing scream ripped through the silence. It was answered by another and another from distant points. The valley of the caves was spewing out its loathsome dwellers from their winter's sleep.

The men raced openly now for the heights. As he leaped, Jerry turned to see over one shoulder a pursuer appear. It was one of the flesh-eaters, head to

the ground on their trail. At sight of them its cry rang out again. It bounded forward in pursuit. And again there were answering screams from the jungle growth.

The men threw themselves frantically up the mountainside. Once Winslow landed in a sprawling heap and groaned as he drew himself to his feet. The beast was below them. Jerry seized a great boulder, whose earth-weight would have made it immovable. He raised it above his head and sent it crashing down the slope.

Another and another he threw. One struck the great beast in mid-air; it was pure luck that drove the stone crashing against the creature's head. It fell back with a blood-chilling snarl that was half shriek. Another monster appeared, to throw itself upon the first and tear at the crushed, waving head.

Jerry took his companion by the arm. His voice came strangled from his straining lungs. "Are you hurt?" he gasped. "Can you run?"

Winslow nodded breathlessly. Again they gathered themselves for their wild, leaping retreat toward the top. An uproar of furious fighting behind them marked where a score of the monsters had gathered for the feast.

Jerry watched vainly for some refuge, some pinnacle of rock or precipice they could climb, and from which they could beat down their attackers. There was nothing but the welter of volcanic waste: rock heaps and boulders and smooth streams of solid lava. Perhaps in the crater, he thought, over the ragged crest of the cone, might be some place of safety.

The pack was in full cry again as they climbed gaspingly to the top. Beyond lay the funnel-shaped crater. Its vast inner slopes were less steep than the hill they had climbed. They were covered with a jungle, like those they had seen—a maze of red toadstools and distorted trees.

Jerry turned savagely to face the oncoming brutes. This, he knew, was the end. For this they had hurled themselves through space—to make a morning morsel

for these incredible beasts.

About the men was a confusion of granite rocks, thrown from the crater to provide weapons, crude and futile, for two puny earth-dwellers. The men raised great rocks in the air and threw them with all their strength. Jerry struggled with a mammoth boulder,—Winslow leaping to his aid. They toppled it over to start an avalanche of devastation that swept into the oncoming monsters.

And again there was respite for their aching arms, while the hunger-crazed brutes tore at the bruised bodies of their fellows.

Jerry Foster looked longingly again toward the crater. Should they chance the shelter of the jungle growth? Hopeless, he knew when these monsters could crash their way through while the men were impeded at every step. The mottled, orange-green stalks, as he watched them, seemed to move. He dashed the sweat from his face—his hair hung matted on his forehead—and passed a grimy hand across his eyes. Plainly, one of those stalks crossed a rocky-floored clearing.

Was he dreaming? Was this all a dream—a mad nightmare from which he could force himself to wake? Another moved. He saw definitely a mushroom growth pass swiftly to lose itself in a neighboring clump. Dreaming? No! The screams from behind him and Winslow's hoarse yell proved the stark reality of his surroundings.

The vile creatures were close: Jerry could see their fierce heads dripping with blood. He reached for his pistol, knew instantly it was useless against these mammoth brutes, and joined Winslow, who was straining desperately at another great rock. It toppled and fell. Jerry hurled himself at a heap of smaller boulders and sent them crashing as fast as he could seize them and throw.

One quick look behind him showed still the impossible vision he had seen. And now there were figures—a mob of them—figures that threw off their wrappings of vegetation as they ran, cast to the ground the toadstool disguises that they held. They were caricatures of men that were swarming up the hill....

He swung again in one last hopeless stand against the first horrible enemy. The two men poured a torrent of stones down the slope; they were useless, except for their delaying the advance. The beasts leaped and dodged. They were close when the rock-rain increased to a deluge.

Jerry was fighting in a red haze through which he saw dimly. He was aware of the hailstorm of boulders that were thick in the air. He saw vaguely the white faces and copper-clad bodies of strange men leaping about him, and he heard the wild bedlam of their shrieks as they joined in the mad battle against the common enemy.

The beasts were swept off in a landslide of loose rock—all but one. Above them, on a high point of stone, it was crouching to spring. A wild human figure, its flesh white as chalk, leaped forward with a tangle of fibers. The tangle was thrown as the brute was in air. A net spread and wrapped around the monster. It fell, clawing and tearing, to roll helplessly down the slope.

The battle was won. Jerry swayed drunkenly on his

feet. About him the mountains seemed whirling, where unreal figures of men with dead white skin and shining copper armor danced dizzily.

He met for an instant the look from Winslow's dazed eyes. Out of the past a picture flashed clearly: Winslow—this same Winslow—arguing that the moon might hold mysteries still. He laughed thickly.

"And I said it was all known," he muttered through slack lips. "Nothing on the moon that wasn't known...."

He was still laughing in a wild inebriation as a net settled close to entangle his swaying figure and bear him helpless to the ground. He saw Winslow similarly bound, saw him lifted to the shoulders of shouting, yelling men, whose stupid, pasty faces were wide-eyed with excitement.

He, too, was raised into the air... They were being carried toward the crater's mouth....

A fight for life in thin air does not make for clear

thinking. Jerry Foster knew only that a nightmare world was whirling about him; that beneath him powerful shoulders supported, while the one who carried him leaped at racing speed down the slope.

They went more slowly down pathways cleared through the rank vegetation. Soft, pulpy vines from the grotesque trees brushed his face. He tried vaguely to shield himself, but his hands were bound fast. He was helpless in the entangling folds of the net.

The touch of cold stone brought him to his senses. He was lying on smooth rock. They were in a clearing. He turned his head to find Winslow, but could not find him.

Across the open ground were naked men, their bodies, like these others, dead white in the sun's glare. They were dragging giant stalks to earth by means of ropes. Trunks and branches, bright in their colors of yellow and orange and flaming red, were hacked to short lengths and piled on all sides. The workers, as Jerry watched, dropped their implements

to race toward him. There was a press of flat, white faces above. His captors, in their copper armor, beat the newcomers back. The babel of chattering voices was deafening.

Again he was lifted into the air—plainly these were no weaklings he had to deal with—and again the warrior band surrounded him as the march was resumed. The milling, shrieking crowd of workers followed in an ear-splitting mob.

The forest ended, and the men went slowly now down smooth, rocky slopes to stop upon a wide, level expanse. Before he was placed on the ground Jerry had a glimpse of a funnel-shaped pit—the mouth of the extinct volcano. And toward it, bound and helpless, was being carried a struggling form which he thought he recognized.

"Winslow!" he shouted. But the bodies in their gleaming copper armor closed about him in a solid throng and cut off his view.

In the sky the sun had moved slowly upward since

first they landed. It slanted brightly now into the eyes of the prostrate man and made a spectacle of his twisting contortions as he tried to get his hands on his knife in its sheath at his belt. This and his pistol were under his coat. But he could not reach them. He lay panting with his exertions.

One of the warriors seemed to have authority, for his arms alone of all the group were sheathed with copper circlets, and the others obeyed his orders. Jerry addressed himself to this one. He knew the words were unintelligible, but he pleaded desperately for a chance.

"Take this off," he said. "We are friendly—friends—friends!" He struggled to keep himself from shouting, to keep his voice under control. "The other man," he said, "bring him back." And again he repeated: "We are friends."

He scanned his captors' faces.

The pasty face above him was impassive; the eyes stared uncomprehendingly into his. Then the figure

barked an order. One of the warriors swung Jerry lightly to his shoulder, and started toward the pit.

At its edge was a basket, a huge affair of knotted fiber ropes. Dimly, Jerry saw other baskets standing about: they were filled with the fragments of fungus. Still bound, he was placed in the empty container. Hands grasped the meshes, and he was swung out over the edge. A rope was above him: he was lowered steadily into the dark shaft.

Jerry breathed a sigh of relief. This was not death—not yet. And Winslow? Safe, perhaps, for he had traveled this same road.

There were figures outlined above against the circle of light, figures that clambered like apes down swaying ropes. The light glinted and sparkled from their shining armor. His escort was still with him.

The circle of light changed to a glowing ring, where only the rim was lighted. Above was the deep black of the lunar sky. Then the circle faded to a mere point as he went down into the pit.

The rope basket came to rest upon a rock floor, and Jerry was lifted out. He saw plainly the figures about him, and he wondered vaguely at the light that came from the walls of the cavern. There were long lines of soft light, leading off into the dark, lines that marked plainly a labyrinth of passageways, leading in all directions.

Beyond a narrow entrance was one brighter than the rest, a broad avenue that led downward still further into the depths. Here he was carried. He tried vainly to keep some mental map of their course. He would return some day—he *must* return—he and Winslow. They would escape.... But the passage turned and twisted; there were many branching corridors, each with its lines of light. Jerry gave up the attempt. It was a maze of serpentine streets beyond his power to remember and recall.

Before him the passage was still wider. It was opening into a great room.... Jerry found himself upon the floor. He strained cruelly at the cords about his head as he twisted and turned to get a view of his surroundings.

The room was a cave, its vast vaulted ceiling sprung high above a level floor, where the figures of men—odd, plaster-white figures like animated statues—were small in the distance. His eyes were drawn quickly to the brilliant glow of the farther wall. There was the bright black of basaltic formation, and in it—though he knew the impossibility—was shining the sun.

Jerry blinked his eyes to look again and again; the golden circle was dazzling. It was set at a point well above the smooth floor, and up to it there led a sloping pathway of gold. It was as if they had indeed captured their god, these worshipers of the sun, had captured and held it for the adoration of the grovelling people.

Jerry saw them upon the floor. The copper of the armored men gleamed bright in the glow from beyond, as they abased themselves and crept slowly toward the light. At each side of the dazzling orb was a platform. There were figures upon it, seated figures, Jerry saw, even at a distance, that were robed in vestments of the sun. Their forms gleamed gold in the

light.

The leader that Jerry had noted among his captors crept on in advance of his men. From among the bright figures on the platform above one rose to extend a glowing arm. He spoke, and the tones rolled majestically back from the high vault above. The crawling man below him stopped rigidly where he was. Another word from above, and he rose slowly to his feet. He stood full in the glow of the captive sun, to be outlined in black against the brilliance beyond.

Haltingly he spoke. Then, seeming to gain confidence, he launched into a torrent of words. He gestured and waved, and, to Foster, the sign language was plain. He saw reenacted the surprise of the warriors upon beholding these intruders; saw how they had spied out upon them, using trunks and branches of the fungus as a screen; saw in pantomime their own battle with the beasts, then the rush of the armed men to the rescue. Again the net was thrown, and the gesturing figure turned to point dramatically where Jerry lay bound, then pounded his armored chest with unconcealed pride.

He ceased to speak, and there was utter silence in the room as the figure above crossed to stand before the golden sun. He too abased himself before the sign of their god, then rose, to stand motionless, listening....

For a breathless interval he waited before the oracle, then prostrated himself again and returned to his place.

He repeated, it seemed, a command, congratulation, to judge by the ecstasy of the figure below. The warrior turned once to throw himself before the image of the sun; he repeated this again and yet again before he crept back to his fellows. The group arose and rushed swiftly toward the bound man.

They brought him quickly into the presence. With scant ceremony Jerry was unrolled from the net; he lay free and gasping upon the floor. The men scurried like mad from out the pathway of light that shone down from the false sun. Jerry rose to his feet; the brilliance before him almost blinded, but he saw now whence it came.

There was a hollow in the wall, a great parabola, deep and wide, and it was lined throughout with beaten gold. In a straight path the light was reflected from every point—every point but one for at the far end, where the curved sides joined, was a circle of darkness. It stared like an eye, evil, portentous. Jerry nerved himself for an ordeal, unknown but imminent. The black eye glared at him unwinkingly.

Before him was the pathway of light: it shone brilliantly down the sloping ramp where a floor of bright gold led up to the sun god itself.

The figure on the dais raised its hand. Jerry heard the words come from its lips and roll sonorously back from above. The figure waited for an answer.

Jerry's hands slipped beneath his coat to rest reassuringly upon his weapons. He withdrew his hands empty and raised one toward the figure above.

"I do not understand your words," he said. "Your language is strange. No doubt mine is as strange to you. I come as a visitor—I am friendly." He held out

both his hands, palms upward.

"We have come, my friend and myself, on a friendly errand." He paused to look vainly about for Winslow. "And you have received us as if we were wild animals."

Jerry Foster, of San Francisco, U. S. A., was suddenly resentful of their treatment. His words were meaningless, but his tones were not. "You have tied us," he said, "bound us—dragged us before you. Is that the way you receive your guests from another world?"

The golden-clad figure stood in majestic silence while Jerry was speaking. It waited a moment after his outburst, then crossed again to bow low in the floodlight of gold. As before, it seemed listening to words from the black heart of the strange sun, words quite inaudible—soundless. He returned quickly and waved Jerry's attention to the place of light.

The sense of a presence there in the central blackness was strong upon the waiting man. In that other life

that now seemed so remote—his life on earth—Jerry had once felt the threat of a concealed intruder in the dark. He recalled it vividly now. The sensation was the same.

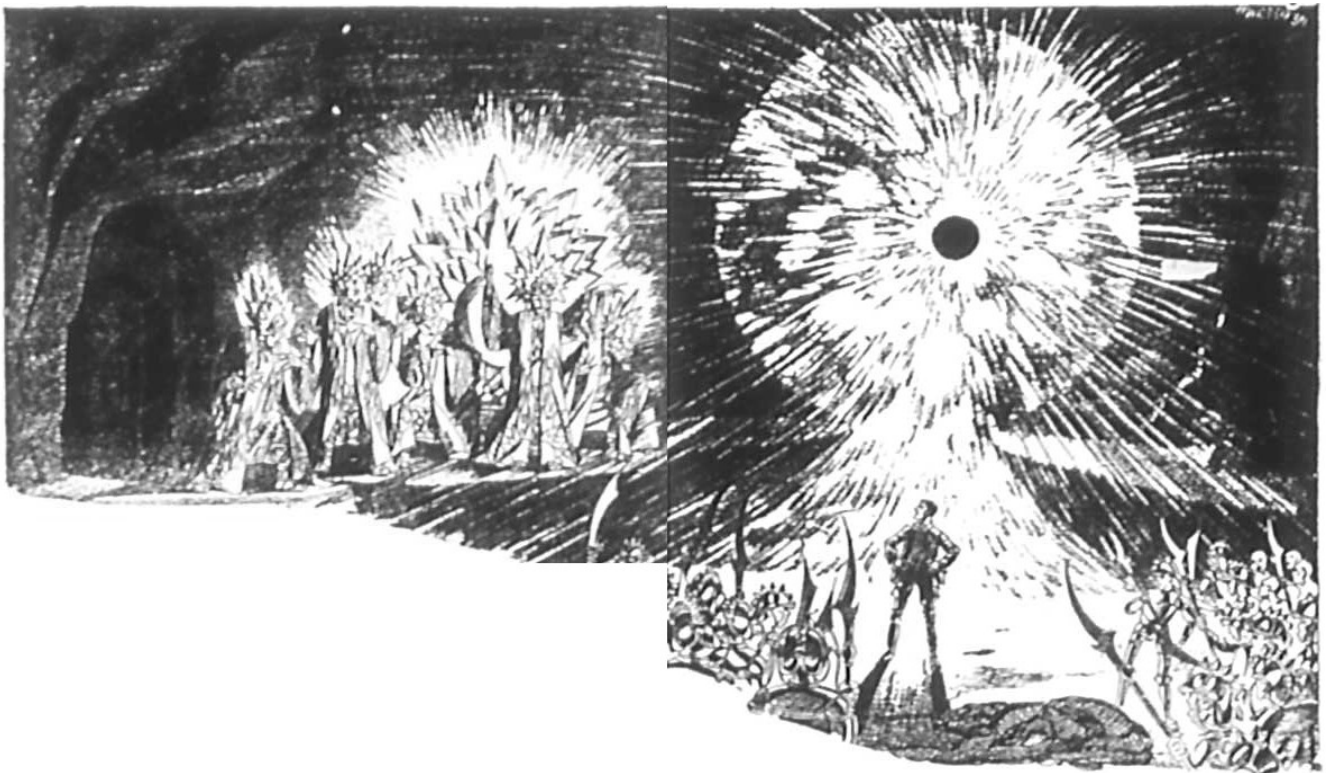
But it was magnified. There was no denying the reality of a malign something at the heart of that golden glow. The black center of it vibrated with cold and venomous hate. It struck upon the waiting man like a physical force. His head was swimming, his thoughts refused to form. He was as if suspended in a great void, where all that was lay deep in the center of that radiant orb. And it drew him irresistibly on.

Like a dazed bird, held and stricken in the hypnotic gaze of a snake, Jerry took one stiff, unconscious forward step. Another, and another. He strove dumbly, helplessly, for realization—there was nothing in the universe but the certain thing ahead.

His foot was upon the golden incline leading to his doom, when that buried something which marks a man—the spark of divinity which sets him apart as one alone—reasserted itself.

"I am," he heard his own voice shouting in strangled tones, "I am Jerry Foster! I am I ... I am myself!"

He awoke from his stupor with a shock that set every nerve-fiber quivering. For long minutes he stood silent. Then, realizing his victory and proving it to his own soul, he looked straight into the black center of the threatening sun god, and he laughed, loudly and contemptuously.



[Image description start: A two-page, black and white illustration showing a crowd of people looking at a big ball of light with a black hole in the center, with one man standing in front, his hands on his hips, with

other, ornately dressed people crowded around the edges of the drawing, holding sharp weapons. Image description end.]

Then, turning, and with steady stride, he walked calmly from the light.

The great hall was silent with a silence that was breathless. Then pandemonium broke loose. The priests and the god had been defied, and screaming and shouts rang throughout the vast chamber to re-echo batteringly from ceiling and walls. There was tumult and confusion where the populace thronged. Even the figures above on the dais were milling about in disorder; the rippling gold of their robes made a spectacle that forced Jerry's involuntary admiration.

Then one from among them sprang forward. His voice roared above the shattering din. The room was still. Another order, and the guard of armed fighting men formed in a circle about the defier of their god.

Jerry waited. Trouble was about due, he told himself. One hand was on his pistol, tense and ready. As the

ranks stood silent and made no move to attack, Jerry Foster did a curious thing.

It was not done intentionally, but Jerry Foster had nerves, and they had been under a strain. His hand went unconsciously to his pocket and extracted a cigarette. There were matches there, too, and he struck one and lighted the white cylinder. The match made a tiny flame where he flipped it.

The whole room whispered and hissed with one loud gasp of amazement, but the moan that followed, that echoed and resounded from the roof, was of nothing but horror. Even the warriors drew back in trembling dismay. And before them the stranger they had brought to the very portal of their sanctum of holies blew clouds of white smoke that eddied and whirled as they rose round his head.

The effect was not lost upon Jerry. And his mind was working. Was fire unknown to these strange beings? Here in the deep caverns, far from the surface, was fire a thing of terror to them? He looked back toward the wall.

"If they rush me," he thought, "there's a good place to be. That will feel mighty comfortable at my back."

He walked slowly, the smoke rising thick about his head. The copper-clad figures before him withdrew, the ranks parting to let him through. Unharméd he reached the safety of the wall. The enemy now formed a semi-circle before him.

The inertia of the stricken beings on the platform was broken by his move. Again their head priest gave an order; from another side a second detachment of armed men came on. They were carrying something. Jerry leaned forward in quivering preparedness as he saw, in the floodlight of radiance, the body of Winslow lying on the floor.

Was he injured? Dead? The devastating loneliness that swept him at the sight of the still body was unnerving. He breathed a long sigh of relief as the lanky figure rose slowly to its feet. Winslow was alive! They would show these beastly, unearthly humans something yet.

There was no preparation—no preliminaries. Whether Winslow could have reacted as Jerry had would never be known. He seemed stunned and helpless, and it was with no resisting hesitation that he began the climb to the unknown.

Jerry's crouching tenseness snapped. No thought of the gun as he sprang toward the enemy between him and his friend. "No, Winslow—no!" he shouted as he leaped at the figures in front of him.

Their strength had seemed startling to Jerry when they had carried him like a child. He had forgotten his lightness here on this unheavy world. And he had forgotten his own great strength.

No panting, exhausted, beaten fighter of beasts was this that hurled himself against the ranks before him. One coppery sword flashed upward above his head. Its bearer was seized in two hands that picked him bodily from the floor and crashed him, a living projectile, among the others. Jerry waited for no more. There was an opening ahead, and beyond was Winslow, walking stiffly, certainly, up that damnable

slope. He threw himself in giant leaps across the floor.

His companion was half-way up the glittering ramp when Jerry seized him. Holding him in his arms, he leaped outward, to land rolling on the floor. He was on his feet in an instant. He dragged Winslow to a standing posture.

"Wake up, man," he was shouting. "Winslow—wake up!"

The onrushing horde was upon them while the tall man was still brushing his hand over weary eyes, and Jerry, for the moment, had the fighting to himself.

No time for anything but parry and strike. He caught one white face on the jaw; the man went bodily through the air. Jerry landed again and again. His weapons were his fists, and they did fearful execution. And he knew, at length, that he was not alone.

The long arms of the inventor tore a sword from an upraised hand. Its owner was thrown, as Jerry had thrown one previously, to catapult among its fellows.

They were clear for an instant. "Back to the wall!" shouted Jerry. He had time and room to reach for his pistol, and drew it quickly from its holster. They backed hastily to the protection of the stone wall. There were scores upon scores of copper-clad figures that followed them held out of reach. With a flashing of gold, the head priest himself sprang to urge on his men.

"Ready!" said Jerry. "I wish you had a gun! Here! Take this!" He handed his companion a long-bladed knife, then turned to aim his pistol with steady hand at the oncoming figure in golden robes.

The priest stopped for a brief scrutiny of this new menace, then screamed out an order and hurled himself into the sheltering press of men.

Jerry fired into the whirl of bodies. The roar of the forty-five tore like a battery of siege guns throughout the great room. But the creatures before them were fighting now in an insane frenzy. Their bodies pressed the two men to the wall. Jerry fired again, and the fall of a limp, gold-robed body gave him a thrill of delight.

The inventor was holding a white body as a shield, while he thrust past it incessantly with a red blade. There were huddled figures before them that lay quiet or crept painfully away. The body of the head priest was being carried off.

The dark mouth of a passage had impressed itself upon Jerry; he remembered it now. It offered a means of escape.

"Off to your right," he said. "Work off to your right. There's a hole in the wall—"

They fought off the struggling eruption of bodies that drove at them. Jerry was saving his ammunition, but once more he fired as a sword was falling over Winslow's head. He drove strongly with his left and beat at the white skulls with the butt of the gun gripped in his other hand.

The passage was suddenly behind them. One last stand against the screaming, frothing faces, and they backed, panting, into the sheltering dark. Jerry stopped and took Winslow by the arm.

"Are you hurt?" he demanded. The inventor was too breathless for reply.

"Nothing much," he panted, after a moment. "One got me along the cheek—you shot him just in time. How about you?"

"O.K.," was the assurance. "But, man, I've been hammered!"

"What a peach of a fight," he added. "But now what?"

Winslow laughed mirthlessly in the dark. "This looks like a one-way street," he said. "We can't go back.

"Say," he demanded, with sudden, dim recollection. "I remember something of a dream—a ghastly sort of thing. I was ... I was ... where was I when you collared me? Where was I headed?"

"For something too damnable for us to imagine," Jerry stated emphatically.

They were walking as rapidly as they dared through

the dark passage. There were high-pitched voices from the rear. From somewhere ahead came the sound of running water.

"Too damnable to imagine!" he repeated. "But we'll hunt the vile thing out if we get a chance, and we'll slaughter—"

The words ended in a startled exclamation as the ground fell beneath their feet. They pitched headlong into nothingness—

There was water in Jerry's face as he fell. A torrent engulfed him as he struck into it, pouring in from a lower passageway to plunge straight down the shaft. The roaring crash of water tore madly at his body; his arm was shot through with stabbing pain as Winslow's falling body was torn from his grasp.

He was conscious only of his bursting lungs when he came to the surface from the depths into which he plunged. With one arm he swam weakly, the other trailing at his side, while he gulped greedily at the air.

A voice came hoarsely from a distance. "Foster," it called. "Jerry—where are you, Jerry?"

Ah, the good air in his lungs—he could swim more strongly now. He managed to gasp an answer: "Here, Winslow, over here!" There was a splashing in response to his voice. He heard it over the noise of the waters he had been swept away from the cataract.

A hand was upon him in the dark. "Hurt?" asked the welcome voice. "Can you swim, Jerry?"

"A little. One arm's working."

The hands fumbled over him quickly, and his good arm was drawn over the other's back. "Hang on," Winslow told him. "I can swim. I'm half fish."

Jerry clung to the folds of the coat. He was light in the water, he felt—riding high—and the man beside him was swimming with strong strokes. He released his hold on the other as he felt strength ebbing back into his body.

"I can paddle," he said: "but stick around. Where are we going?"

"In a circle, probably," was the reply, "though I'm trying to hold a straight course. How big is this lake, I wonder?"

They swam slowly, saving their strength, but it was a time that seemed like endless hours before the answer to Winslow's question was found. Jerry was fighting weakly, exhausted, and the hand supporting him was failing when they felt sharp rocks against their dragging feet. The hand that had held him still clung tightly to his shoulder as they struggled upward and fell together where great rocks gave safety in the darkness. In his arm the sharp pain had dwindled to numbness; Jerry Foster asked only for sleep.

There was light about him when he awoke. In his stupor he had found again the surroundings he knew so well—the clash and clatter of a distant city—the roaring traffic—signals, and glowing lights. He came slowly back to unwelcome reality. The light was there, but it shone in luminous lines along the wall to

illumine the hateful familiarity of the honeycombed rock that composed the moon.

It showed, too, a familiar figure, breathing heavily where it lay on the far side of the small room.

Winslow's face was pale in the dull light, and his eyes were closed. He was on a thick pallet of soft fibers and across his body a cloth was spread, shot through with gold in strange designs.

Jerry Foster threw aside a robe of the same material that covered him. He stifled an involuntary word as a twinge of pain shot through his arm, then crossed noiselessly to shake softly at the shoulder of the sleeping man. Winslow, too, came slowly from his sleep of complete exhaustion, but his eyes were clear when they opened.

"Where are—" he began a question, but Jerry's hand was pressed quickly against his lips.

They stared slowly about. The room that held them was in the natural rock, but whether hewn out by hands or a natural formation they could not tell. The

rock was rotten with perforations, through which air flowed in a cool stream.

Jerry came softly to his feet to feel cautiously of the glowing, luminous mounds along the wall. They were spread upon a ledge. The light was cold to his touch, the material like fine soil in his hands.

"Fluorescent," whispered Winslow. "Calcium sulphide, possibly; I saw them spreading it above ground in the sun. It absorbs light and gives it off slowly." Jerry nodded; the source of the endless glowing lines had been puzzling to him.

Their whispers ceased at a sound beyond a doorway. In the opening a figure appeared, tall and erect, the figure of a girl. Her face was white like the others of these whose lives were lived below the surface, but there was a kindly softness in the eyes, a refinement and intelligence of no low order, that contrasted with the cold eyes of the warriors and the priests. Not beautiful, perhaps, by earth standards, yet it required no straining of chivalry on Jerry's part to find her human and lovely.

In silence the men stood staring. Then Foster, with unconscious gentleness, made a revealing gesture. This woman—this girl—had saved them. He knew it without words, and he was wordless to reply. He dropped swiftly to his knees and pressed a bit of the golden robe against his lips.

A flush of scarlet swept across the white face and receded. The hand dropped from its startled poise and rested, gently, questioningly, on the brown head bent before her.

She murmured unintelligible words in a guarded voice as Jerry arose. "Marahna," she said, and touched her breast lightly. "Marahna." Her head was erect, the whole attitude imperious, commanding. She questioned them with swift, liquid words. The men shook their heads in utter incomprehension.

Again she spoke, and again they shook their heads. Jerry felt foolish and dumb. He took his turn at questioning, and this time, with a trace of a smile, it was the girl's turn to shake her head. She had mastered one sign at least.

Pointing toward the great hall they knew was somewhere above, she reenacted the scene there; she evidently knew what had transpired. And now Jerry nodded in confirmation. That she approved of the part they had played was evident.

Now she questioned whence they had come. She pointed down, and her fluttering hands and graceful posture spoke eloquently. She showed them more than a trace of fear, too, as she marked them coming from the depths. Jerry shook his head in vehement denial.

He pointed above, spread his hands wide, tried as best he could to indicate vast distance beyond. She stared, wide-eyed, then in her turn knelt as if before a god.

"She thinks we have come down from the sun," Winslow surmised. "Well, let it go at that." But Jerry Foster was embarrassed in the strange role of a god; he raised the humbled, kneeling young woman to her feet.

He pointed to her gold-clad figure and repeated the name she had given. "Marahna," he said. "Marahna!" Then, placing his hand on his companion, he repeated: "Winslow—Winslow!" And, pointing to himself, he completed the introduction with: "Foster, Jerry—Jerry Foster!"

The pale lips formed themselves slowly to the strange and unaccustomed sounds.

"Cherrie," she repeated, and smiled in comprehension. "Cherrie."

This was the first of many lessons, and it was amazing to both men how rapidly they learned to get their thoughts across. In turn, they learned to read the messages that the slim hands and graceful, undulating body conveyed. Even words were linked one by one with their indicated objects and meanings.

One syllable the girl used only in a hushed and awe-stricken tone. It was "Oong" that she whispered, while her eyes filled with terror and dread. And they knew this for the name of the horror that waited in

the black center of that unholy place where the pathway of light ascended. It was later that they learned to read hatred as well as sheer terror in the emotions that the word *Oong* aroused.

The first lesson ended in a soft exclamation from the girl. She withdrew, to return in a moment with a beaker of hammered gold, filled with cold water. In her hands, too, were strange fruits and branches of fungus. She ate bits of them to show they were food. And Jerry, as he watched her, was aware that he was famished. But the two men ate sparingly at first of the strange food.

It was tasteless, they found, except for an elusive flavor, but the reception of the food in their gnawing stomachs was satisfactory. Their strength was returning, and with it came hope of release. The moon-people, evidently, were not altogether villainous.

"Thank you," said Jerry in a normal tone, "that was—" White fingers trembled against his lips to enforce silence.

The girl listened intently, then stole softly out into the corridor from which she had come. She motioned the men to follow, and pointed there in the dim light to a far room.

There were others, they saw; a group of young women lying at ease on their pallets, or moving slowly about. The need for quiet was apparent, more so when the figure of a man appeared as they watched. Quickly the girl, Marahna, stepped before them and motioned them back to their room.

She followed and glanced quickly about. In the farther wall was an opening, close to the floor, and low, but they managed to work their way through at her silent command. A passage, much like the others, lay beyond. It widened and grew higher, until they could stand erect. Back in the circle of light they saw, for a moment, the man, bowing low in respect before Marahna. He carried a basket of light that shone brightly in the room.

"Replenishing the supply of sulphide," whispered Winslow.

A current of air came cool and refreshing from a branching tunnel in the rock. There was no lack of ventilation, as they well knew, throughout all the tortuous passages, but this came with a scent of outdoors that set both men a-tingle with hope. Jerry forgot even the dull ache in his arm as he breathed deep of this messenger from the outside.

But exploration must wait. They needed to rest, to learn and to plan. They returned when Marahna called softly from the room.

Time had lost all its meaning. They could only guess at the hours that had passed since the hour they left their ship, could only make unanswered surmises as to where was the sun or how much was left of the long lunar day. They must escape—they would escape—but their one stroke for freedom must not be made when darkness and paralyzing cold should force them back into the hands of the enemy tribes.

Marahna was with them much of the time, and always they struggled and strove with desperate concentration to grasp at the meanings of the

thoughts she tried to convey. And they learned much.

Of the passage they believed they had found out to the surface, she knew little. But she showed them, with doubt in her face, that there was almost hopeless struggle along that path to the freedom above. Sadly she touched Jerry's injured arm, and she shook her head in dejection.

The arm had had a bad wrench, Jerry found. No fracture, but the muscles and ligaments had been painfully torn. But Jerry set his teeth firm at the thought of a possible escape.

Once, peering along the dark passage that led to the room where the others had been seen, the men noticed the deep bows that unfailingly marked the entrance of Marahna. They questioned her and learned that here was royalty among the people of the moon. This, as they considered the proud poise of her head and her whole attitude of unassuming superiority was not entirely surprising. But they marveled the more at the truth that she finally made plain to them.

Marahna, she told them, as plainly as if she were speaking in their own tongue, Marahna was chosen for death. And her white face was pitiful and her eyes full of horror as she enacted for them the slow march she must take up the long golden slope and into the horror that waited.

"A sacrifice to that god!" Jerry spoke with dismay. "No, no!" But the face of the Princess Marahna of the moon people was unutterably sad with unspoken thoughts as she touched her breast with one slender finger, then indicated the outer room and showed there were two there beside herself who were to go.

"Help us to get out," Jerry begged, and with fierce eagerness he showed them going through the passage to the outside. "We will come back, and we will find some way to end all this damnable thing."

She gave them to understand the time that was left. The sun, she showed, was long past the meridian and was on its return. The day was now reaching a close. And then, as the sun set, the great sacrifice would be made—had always been made—to insure the return of

their god.

Their watches were useless, for the water had entered their cases. The two men waited what they judged was the length of a day, while Jerry tried to believe that his arm was improving. Then, putting a small supply of food in their pockets, they were ready for the attempt.

Jerry saw that his gun and knife were ready at his belt, and patted a pocket where his matches were safe in their watertight container. The prospect of escape almost unnerved him. To breathe the clear air; to stand in the radiant light of the sun—he could understand now how these people made a god of the sun. He turned to Marahna.

"Good-by," he said, "but not for long. We'll be back. And we'll save you, Marahna, we'll save you. Winslow will figure some way to do it.... We'll be back...."

The girl was silent. She touched Jerry's arm, and shook her head slowly, doubtfully.

He reached for the hand. It trembled, he felt, in his. The impulse to take the slim form within his arms, to hold her close, was strong upon him. Would he ever see her again ... would he?

"Won't you say good-by, Marahna?" he asked.

But she smiled, instead—a friendly smile, and encouraging. Then dropped in silence to her knees to press with both her trembling hands his hand upon her forehead. And, still in silence, she rose to vanish from the room.

The men entered the narrow opening to start forward into the dark. But Jerry Foster was puzzled, puzzled and more than a trifle hurt. Marahna could at least have said good-by. She knew the word, for he had taught it to her. And she had let him—them—go....

"Oh, well," he thought, "how can I know how a princess feels—a princess of the moon? And why should I care—why should she? But...." He refused to complete the thought. He hurried instead, as best he could, to follow Winslow, fumbling ahead of him in the

dark.

Jerry had used plenty of muttered invective with the massage he had given his arm, but he cursed his handicap wholeheartedly at the end of some several hours.

They were standing, he and Winslow, in a dark tunnel. They had climbed and clawed their way through the absolute dark, over broken fragments, through narrow apertures, down and up, and up again through a tortuous, winding course. And now they had reached the end. They had found the source of the fresh air, had come within reaching distance, it seemed, of sunlight and all that their freedom might mean. And they had come, too, to a precipitous rock wall.

They stared long and hopelessly at the shaft that reached, vertical and sheer, high, high over their heads. And a curse like that of Tantalus was theirs. For, far at the top, slanting in through some off-shooting passage, there was sunlight. It was unmistakable in its clear glare, beautiful, glorious—

and unattainable.

There were roughnesses in the wall, footholds, handholds here and there. "It might be ... it might be...." Jerry tried to believe, but the ache in his arm made the thought hopeless and incomplete. He turned to his companion.

"I believe you can do it," he said steadily.

Winslow's dark eyes were gleaming in the dimness that surrounded. "Possibly," he replied, and eyed the ascent with an appraising stare. "Even probably. But you know damn well, Foster, that I'm not going to try."

"Don't be an ass." Jerry's tone was harsh, but the tall man must have known what emotions lay underneath.

"We'll play it out together," he said.

Jerry was silent as he reached in the darkness for Winslow's hand.

"Of course I knew you were that sort," he said. He

waited a moment, then added: "But you're going, old man, you're going. Don't you see it's our only hope?"

Winslow shook his head emphatically. Jerry could see him in the dim reflection from that radiance above.

"Nothing doing," the calm voice assured him. "Don't bother to think up more reasons why I should desert."

"Listen!" Jerry gripped roughly at the other's shoulder. "Listen to reason."

"If you go and I go back there, what will happen? With Marahna gone we are helpless, and we will be helpless to save her. The long night is ahead. How can we live? Where can we live? We will be wiped out as sure as we're alive this minute.

"If you go—and if you make it to the ship—there's a chance. Alone, I may manage to stick it out." He knew he was lying, knew that the other knew it too, but he went on determinedly. "You can wait for me up above. My arm will be well—" Winslow stopped him with a gesture.

"There's a chance," the older man was muttering, "there's a chance...." He swung quickly toward Foster, to grab hard at the good right hand.

"I'm going," he stated. "I'm on my way. I won't say good-by; what's the use—I'll be back soon!"

He released his hold on Jerry to leap high in the air for a ledge of projecting rock. He caught it and hung. His foot found a toehold and he drew himself up to where another rough outcrop gave grip for his hand.

Jerry Foster stood frozen to throbbing stillness. Words were strangling in his throat, an impulse, almost irresistible, to call. If there were only a rope....

He was still silent when the tiny figure of his companion and friend was lost in the heights, where it vanished into that tunnel from which came the light. He turned blindly, to stumble back into the dark.

Marahna was waiting when he regained the safety of her room. "Safety!" The thought was bitter when

linked with the certain fate that lay ahead.

Silently she stroked the bent head of the man who dropped dejectedly upon the hard stone floor. Her fingers were gentle, comforting, despite the utter hopelessness and discouragement that lay heavily upon him.

They sat thus, nor counted the flying minutes, while the fog of despair in the mind of the beaten man was clearing. He raised his head finally to meet the look in the dark eyes. And he managed a smile, as one can who has thought his way through to the bitter end and has faced it. He patted the hand that had stroked his bowed head.

"It's all right," he said gently. "What is to be, will be—and we can't change it. And it's all right somehow."

His sleeping, during their long stay, had been a cause for amusement to Marahna, whose habits were tuned to the long days and nights on the moon. And he was sleepy now, sleepy and tired. She spread the robe over him as he rested on the soft fiber bed.

He awoke from a deep sleep with a light heart. For Jerry Foster, as he faced his own certain death, had seen certain things. It was the end—that was one fact he couldn't evade. But he grinned cheerfully, all by himself in that strange cheerless room, as he thought of what else he had visioned.

"And it will be just one hell of a fight," he said softly aloud. "There will be some of those priests that will know they have been in a war."

He examined again the knife and the automatic, and counted the cartridges left in the magazine. There were more he had found in a pocket of his coat, enough to replace those he had fired. He slipped the pistol into its holster at the sound of soft footsteps approaching.

It was Marahna who entered, a strange and barbaric Marahna. She was clad in a garment of spun gold that enveloped her tall figure. It trailed in rippling beauty on the floor—draped in resplendence her slim body, to end in soft folds about a head-dress that left Jerry breathless.

Her face was entirely concealed. The gold helmet covered her head. It was tall, made entirely of hammered gold in which spirals of jewels reflected their colors of glittering light. She was quite unrecognizable in the weird magnificence.

Only her voice identified the figure. She murmured chokingly some soft words, then raised her head with its barbaric helmet proudly high as she concluded. There were words become familiar now to Jerry. Together with the spectacle she presented, her meaning was more than plain.

"The time has come," she was telling him. "The sun ... the hour of sacrifice."

Jerry leaped to his feet. His plans for battle were being revised. An idea—a plan, half-formed—was beating in his brain.

A sound was beating upon him, too. There were drums that throbbed in steady unison, that echoed hollowly along resounding walls, that approached in loudly increasing cadence.

The plan was complete. "No!" said Jerry Foster, with a wild laugh. He reached to remove the golden helmet.

He placed it upon his own head, under the startled gaze of the wondering girl. He reached out for the robe.

"You shall not go," he told her. "I will go in your place. And when I reach that room...." His eyes were savage behind the slits in the golden head-dress.

"No—no!" the girl protested. Her face showed plainly the complete hopelessness of what Jerry proposed. To pit himself against that antagonist—she knew how futile was the brave gesture.

Jerry was undaunted. "I've got to die anyway," he tried to explain, "and if I can get in one good crack at whatever is there—well, I may be of help."

His hand was taking off the cloak. Marahna's eyes were steady upon him. She ceased to resist. She whipped one of the covers from the couch about her and helped him with the golden robe.

The throbbing of drums was hammering at Jerry's temples. They were close at hand! Marahna, without a word, rushed frantically back toward the room where the others waited.

And again Jerry Foster felt that odd tightening of disappointment about his heart. But what was the difference, he told himself, in a hundred years—or a hundred minutes. He set his lips tight and walked slowly out and down the passage.

The room he entered was deathly quiet. There were figures standing about, figures robed in their gold-threaded drapes, that stared strangely, wonderingly, at him, and drew themselves into a huddled group against the wall. And two there were, who stood apart: the other victims—their sacrificial garments wrapped them round where they waited for the third who was to accompany them. Jerry joined them as a guard came in from the outer hall.

The drums were rolling softly in their rhythmic beat. The priests who entered showed annoyance at the delay; they gave a curt order, and motioned the three

to follow.

Outside, the corridor was broad, and the double rows of lights on either side glowed brightly to illumine a pageant grotesque and terrible in its barbaric splendor. The drums throbbed louder. Jerry saw them in their fire of burnished metal, beaten by the bands of naked men. Beyond, a group of warriors waited. Stalwart and strongly muscled, they stood erect in copper armor beside a platform of metal bars, whose floor was of latticed gold. The victims were placed upon it to stand erect. Jerry balanced himself upon the golden floor as the warriors raised it slowly to their shoulders.

Priests, in robes of heavy golden rope, were ranged about; they formed a guard and escort ten deep about the living sacrifice. At that the drums increased their volume, and to this was added a nerve-racking, discordant and rasping jangle, when sheets of copper, paper-thin, were struck with a heavy hand. The pulsing, throbbing pandemonium was terrific as the march began.

Slowly they made their way through a winding gallery. Slowly they came to where a portal, high-arched, gave entrance upon the great hall. Solemnly, proudly, the priests lead the way as they circled the vast room. Their wrappings of gold were a scintillant quiver of light; above each hard face a circle of gold—symbol of the sun—was borne imperiously high.

The priestly guard surrounded the platform where the three standing figures were huddled. And behind, and on either side, the men with the drums and the discordant, ringing sheets gave full force to their blows. The high vault above thundered and roared to the thunder and roar of the drums. And, high over all, a wailing began.

The thin shrillness beat with the tempo of the drums in a pitch that steadily descended. The glittering procession had come to rest at its appointed place in the pathway, of light as the wailing came down to a moan. "*Oong! Oong!*" the voices groaned, while the walls re-echoed the despairing tones. Only from the band of warriors did the ear of Jerry Foster detect anything but misery and despair. The priests were

silent, but the warriors, in their shining armor, stood erect and roared out the syllables in exultant joy.

The priests were now upon the dais—the rocky platform, divided by the great, glowing parabola of light. They stood erect as a new high priest, replacing the one Jerry had killed, crossed to bow and grovel in the radiance from their god.

The room was silent with the silence of a great tomb as the march of death began. Softly, from the silence, the drums resumed the merest whisper of their former thunderous booming. Beside him, Jerry heard the soft sobs of a girl. One of the figures swayed and threatened to fall as the platform was lowered to rest upon the floor. The other pressed close to support the drooping figure.

Now the entire directed ray of light from the round, glowing hole struck full upon them. It blinded and dazzled, yet, plain and distinct, Jerry saw at its heart the circle of blackness, the eye of the mysterious, hypnotic parabola—the entrance to what lay beyond.

The beat of the drums was hypnotic. As if in a trance he saw, at the side of the way they must go, the form of the head priest beckon them on. The two victims at his side took one step on the path to their death. And the same stiff rigidity held Jerry as he, too, moved onward and up the golden ramp.

The drums were bearing them on. Louder they throbbed in a steady crescendo, to carry the three rigid figures a step at a time up the pathway of light.

The priest, Jerry felt more than saw, was beside them. Close ahead was the blackness that held the set stare of his eyes. One of the golden figures was before him. He saw the priest reach out to take the helmet from her head.

The movement aroused him from his numb horror. An impulse to escape surged through him; every nerve was tense and ready for a spring. He looked quickly about. The warriors were behind, the priests ready on their platform to direct them. And in the doorway, from where he first had seen this chamber, on the only way he knew that led to freedom, another figure,

tall in its priestly robes, blocked the passage.

Hopeless, he knew. And then there swept through him a wave of hate. Gone was his horror, and gone the dull deadness of brain and body. There, facing him, was the mouth of the pit, where waited a something—horrible, rapacious—demanding the lives of these people ... of Marahna ... of others—more and yet more.

No thought now of life or escape. For the moment, Jerry Foster's whole being held nothing but hot hate, and the wish for revenge.

Before him the priest was stripping the robe from the girl at his feet. She stood like a statue, a carving of purest alabaster, slim and erect in her white, slender nakedness. And the face that he saw through incredulous eyes was that of Marahna.

Marahna! The realization and quick understanding held him spellbound. She had come, had taken the robes from another poor victim ... to be with him in this, the last hour....

Marahna—a princess among these strange folk—was giving her life when another could have been in her place. And she smiled tremulously, bravely, as her eyes locked with his, as, speechless and spellbound, he stared through the eyelets of gold.

The priest was reaching for his head-dress, Jerry tensed. The moment had come.

He was ready. As the weight left his shoulders, he dropped, with one swift movement, his golden disguise. The robe fell in folds at his feet. He stared in silence, through narrowing eyes, at the face of the head priest above him. Then, leaping straight up, he fastened one hand, sinewy, sun-browned and strong, on the white neck below the white face. They crashed back, to land on the ramp and roll, struggling, toward the edge.

Jerry's hold never slackened. He felt his fingers sink deep in the flesh. He came to his knees, then up, to hold the writhing figure at arm's length. Then, heaving with all his strength, he whipped the man into the air, to drag him in one leaping bound for the

sheltering darkness beyond.

A figure was entering with him—a slim, naked figure, with glowing and worshipping eyes.

Behind them the silence was shattered. Jerry saw, as he stepped from the light, the riot of figures that surged in hysterical frenzy through the great hall. The priests were leaping among them ... the tall priest who had guarded the door was fighting his way through the mob.

Jerry loosed his quivering hand from the throat it held. He cast the figure from him. And he blinked his eyes to make them serve him in the blackness all about.

Beside him, a form, invisible in the dark, was stroking at his face, and a voice was whispering tremulously: "Cherrie ... Cherrie!"

The tumult in the great hall reached them but faintly. Jerry Foster strove desperately to focus his eyes in that darkness of utter night. A dim glow from the

portal crept softly in to bring faint illumination to the farther wall. Slowly his eyes found that which they feared yet sought.

Off in the dark, directly opposite the entrance, was a white and ghostly thing. Formless and vague, it wavered and blurred to his straining eyes. He fumbled clumsily for a match, one of his treasured store. He must see—he must know what was waiting —

The match flared to a point of brilliance in the murky gloom. It showed, on the floor where they stood, a litter of dried vegetation—food, doubtless placed there as an offering. It was dry now, and dusty, and through it there shone the bleak whiteness of bones. Beyond was the floor, and beyond that.... The whiteness that had been but a blur grew sharply distinct.

Jerry could not have told what he expected the light to disclose. Certainly it was not the heaping of coils, milk-white and ghastly, that took shape before his staring eyes. Above them a head hung in air. It was

motionless—lifeless, almost—like the coiled body that held it. But the eyes, black and staring, in the bloated, bulging head, made its poised stillness the more deadly.

Even in the dark Jerry had sensed the hypnotic spell of unseen eyes. Visible, they held him in a rigid, unreasoning terror. Unreal, unthinkable, this serpentlike horror, tremendous and ghastly in its loathsome whiteness. A dweller in the dark, used by the priests as a symbol and a threat for the ignorant folk who trusted and believed them. And it held him, stilled and stricken, in its evil spell.

The flame was scorching Jerry's hand that nervelessly opened to release the match. The man was like a statue, frozen to mental deadness. About his feet a light was playing, unseen. A bit of the dry stuff sprang brightly to yellow flame. Neither seeing nor feeling, the figure of Jerry Foster stood, held in the deadly magic of the malignant eyes.

Dimly he sensed that the prostrate body on the floor was that of Marahna. Vaguely he knew when the form

of the priest took a halting step forward. The fire his match had kindled was rising about his feet. The flames seared and stabbed with a pain that reached his dulled brain. Quivering and shaken, the body of Jerry Foster reacted again to a conscious thought. He leaped quickly as the deadly witchery left him, and he tore at the smoldering cloth about his legs.

And now he knew the thing before him for what it was. Shocking in its gigantic size, more so in the concentrated venom of its gaze, it was the flabby, scaly and crusted whiteness of the thing that filled his being with a deadly nausea. He stared with a sickened fascination at the flabby, drooping pouches beside the mouth, the distorted, bulging head and the short legs, armed with long, curving talons—legs that sprang from out the neck to clutch and tear at what the jaws might hold.

Deadly and hateful—loathsome beyond all imagining—still Jerry Foster found it was something a man could meet. Its devilish power to paralyze and still the soul of him was gone.

He snatched quickly for the gun at his belt and knelt to aim—then checked his finger on the trigger. The figure of the priest had come between him and the monster.

The golden robe was dragging. It fell to the floor, to gleam dully in the flickering light of the fire. Against the heaping coils of white the priest was outlined, drawn, as Jerry sensed, against the protest of every fiber of his being. Yet, one stiff step at a time, he went faltering on. The hair above his white face was torn in disarray. And the face itself, so exultantly fierce in its hour of triumph, now a mask of quivering, hopeless terror.

The head of the monster came slowly to life. It raised and raised into the air. The mouth gaped open with a hoarse, sucking sound, then struck, like a whip of light, at the doomed priest.

His screams, as the thing descended upon him, rang through the roar of the forty-five. Jerry fired again where the black eyes showed above the writhing body of their prey. The head jerked backward, to tower in

the darkness overhead. The mouth disgorged its contents to the floor.

Only for a shuddering instant did the monster pause. Then it launched its great bulk in a counter-attack, while the automatic poured out the rest of its futile lead.

The gun was knocked from his grasp as the great head smashed past, swerved from its aim by the blinding bullets. Jerry knew only that his knife was in his hand as the great scabrous coils closed inevitably about him.

Vaguely he heard the shouting from behind as the writhing folds engulfed him. He stabbed blindly at the scaly mass; again and again his knife ripped slashingly at the abhorrence that drew him close. Then his arm, too, was caught in the crushing loathsome embrace....

He felt no pain—the pressure alone was insufferable. His head was drawn back. Above him the horrible eyes glared into his—there was blood dripping from

the jaws....

He saw it in the brilliance of a light that flashed in blue heat overhead. There came in his ears a vast roaring of sound, a great heat-blast that scorched and burned at his face. The crushing pressure was relaxed. He went reeling to the floor, as the great coils whirled high into the air.

He was stunned by the fall, his body inert and relaxed. But he knew through it all that from somewhere above there was shrieking of gas—blue, roaring fires—a flame that tore blastingly into a writhing contortion beyond.

The tall figure of a priest was bending over him, but it was the voice of Winslow that was in his ears—a blessed, human voice—when he awoke.

"Thank God, I made it," the voice was saying, over and over. "Thank God, I found the ship and got back here in time!"

There was light within the cavern. The burning

fungus was extinguished by the smothering coils that had crashed upon it, but beyond was a waving plume of yellow where a blue flame shot against a wall of rock.

And Jerry, through the stress and riot of emotion that overwhelmed him, laughed chokingly, wildly, at the words of his companion.

"It is sodium," Winslow was saying in explanation, as he saw Jerry's eyes resting on the light. "A hydrogen flame, but there's sodium in the rocks that turns the flame yellow. I rigged up a flame-thrower of hydrogen."

"You would," Jerry gasped through hysterical laughter. "You would do just that, and make your way back to this hell just to save me—you damn fool inventor!"

He clung to Winslow, who was raising him to his feet. Marahna was beside him, robed in the golden garment of the priest. She placed her hands beside his face to turn him toward the further wall. The light

was fickle, but it showed him, as it rose and fell, the blackened, swollen body of the monster, still writhing in its death struggle. And beside it, blasted and charred, the head of the obscene sun god, severed by the cutting, obliterating blast, lay flabby and black in a silent heap.

"Rather effective," said Winslow complacently, "though I didn't have much to work with. Two small vials of my liquid and a hand generator to furnish the current. A tubular strut from the frame of the ship made the blow-pipe."

"And these?" Jerry questioned, and pointed to the priest's vestments that Winslow still wore.

"Oh, it was all quiet up above," said the inventor, "and I came down the rope. But there was one of them waiting at the bottom. He didn't need these any more when I left, so I took them to help get about—"

He stopped, to cross quickly and pick up the flame-thrower as the flame died away. It roared as he worked at the mechanism, then dwindled again. Its

light, for an instant, was reflected in a liquid on the floor.

"Broken!" said Winslow in an anguished voice. "The vials are gone—smashed! And I counted on this to hold off the mob, to get us safely out...."

He regarded the instrument with silent dismay. The blue flame, as he held it, flickered and died.

"Not so good!" said Jerry slowly. He stopped to retrieve the knife. This, he reflected, was their sole weapon of defense. In the dim light his eyes met with Winslow's in mutual comprehension of their plight.

There were caverns beyond, dark and forbidding. Did they lead to the outer world? Or, instead, was it not probable that they went to some deep, subterranean dens, from which this monster had learned to come at the priests' summons? Jerry put from his mind all thought of escape in that direction.

"And Marahna, too," he told Winslow. "What will become of her?"

The girl got the essence of the question. Fumbling for phrases that they knew, she made them believe that she was safe. Her people, she told them, would protect her.

"Yes," Jerry agreed. "I guess that's right. She's a princess, you know," he reminded Winslow, "and the great mass of the people look up to her. Only the priests and warrior gangs will be opposed. But how can we get through them?"

The question was unanswered.

"We've got to knock them cold some way," said the inventor. "Got to give them a fright that will last till they let us get through. Once at the big shaft where we came down, we can make our getaway. But how to do it...." His voice died away in dismal thought.

Jerry's eyes were casting about. The priest's robe? No, not good enough. It had brought Winslow through, but it couldn't take them back. Marahna? No help there: she had enough to do to protect herself from the fury of the priests.

His eyes rested again on the steaming, blackened mass that still showed the horrible features that had marked the head of the monster. The sun god! There was an idea there.

"Come!" he said to Winslow, and walked swiftly across to the severed head.

He had to steel his nerves before he could lay hands upon the vile thing. The paws were still attached behind the head. He took a grip on one and pulled. The great mass moved.

"I don't get the idea," said Winslow.

"Nor I," Jerry admitted, "but there's an idea here." His thoughts were racing in the moment's silence.

"I've got it," he shouted. "I've got it! If only I can make Marahna understand!" He led the girl nearer to the door, where his signs could be seen more plainly.

"You," he told her, "go out there." He pointed to the place where the priests had stood. "Tell your

people"—he took the attitude of the orator declaiming to his audience—"we have come here from the sun." Again his signs were plain. Marahna nodded. This plainly was literal truth to her.

"Tell them," he continued earnestly, "we have saved them from this thing. Tell them it was no sun god, but a monster that the priests had kept. Monster!" he exclaimed, and pointed to the head and to the body that still writhed and jerked spasmodically. "No god—no!" And again the girl showed her understanding. Her eyes were glowing.

"Then," said Jerry, indicating Winslow and himself, "we will take the head that they have worshipped, and we'll drag it out and throw it to the priests." His gestures were graphic. The girl nodded her head in an ecstasy of comprehension.

"And then," Jerry added softly for Winslow's hearing, "we'll beat it. And, with luck, we'll make it safe."

"There's a chance," said Winslow softly, "there's a chance—and that's all we ask."

It's up to you, Marahna," Jerry told her. His words were meaningless, but the tone sufficed. She drew herself proudly erect, wrapped herself closely in the robe of braided gold, and stepped firmly and fearlessly through the portal and down toward the platform of the priests.

The two men watched from the shadows. Beyond the outline of the platform they saw the warrior clans, a phalanx of protecting bodies. And beyond, drawn back in huddled consternation, were masses of white-faced people—Marahna's people—who listened, now, in wondering silence to their princess.

Marahna made her way slowly to the platform's edge. Of all the countless ones to have gone that road, she was the first ever to return. She stood silent, while her eyes found their way scornfully over the enemy below. Then looking beyond them, she began to speak.

Her soft voice echoed liquidly throughout the room. She gestured, and Jerry knew that she was giving them the message.

From the priests there came once a hoarse, inarticulate growl of hate and unbelief. She silenced them with her hand. She pointed to the heavens, and she told them of the sun and of the two who were true children of the sun, who had come to save them from their false god.

Her voice rose as she told her people in impassioned tones that which she had seen. And she was shouting above the tumult of the priests and pointing directly at them as she made the roof echo with the message: "*Oong devah! Oong devah!*"

"The god is dead," translated Jerry. "*Devah* means death; she said that of herself before we left. Come on!" he shouted, and laid-hold of one great claw. "It's our turn now."

Winslow was tugging at the other foot. Between them they dragged into the light the obscene burden. Down the long ramp they took it and off upon the platform of the priests, where Marahna waited.

The priests, as Jerry's quick glance showed, were

milling wildly about. It seemed that a charge was soon to follow, but the commotion ceased as the two men come upon the platform, hauling between them the great scorched head of "Oong." The vast hall was without movement or sound as they made their way out to the front. Jerry stood erect and faced the crowd.

He pointed, as had Marahna, toward the sun somewhere above those thick masses of rock; he traced it in its course across the sky; he pointed to Winslow and himself. And in loudest tones he roared throughout the room his message. "Oong," he shouted, "*Oong devah!*"

"I'll count three," he whispered in the utter silence. "Then let 'er go!"

Again he took a firm hold on the flabby paw.

"One," he whispered, and swung his body with the word. "Two ... and *three!*"

The men heaved mightily upon the gruesome horror.

The head swung ghastly in scorched whiteness into the air. The dead jaws fell open as it crashed downward among the huddled, stricken priests.

"This way!" commanded Winslow. He had been carefully appraising the openings in the crowd. "And don't hurry! Remember, you're a god to them—or something a darn sight worse."

Heads proudly erect, the two strode firmly down the pathway of golden light. The room was silent as the few they met fell back in cringing fear. Slowly, interminably, the long triumphal march was made across the rocky cavern of the moon.

Not till they reached the portal did the silence break. The shrieks of the priests and the clashing of copper were behind them, as they vanished with steady steps from out the room.

"Now run!" ordered Winslow. "Run as if the devils from hell were after you—and I think they are!" The two tore madly down the corridor whose double rows of brightness made possible their utmost speed.

There was the narrowing of the passage—Jerry remembered it—where they came out at the foot of the great shaft, the dead throat of the volcano. Behind them the shrieks and clamor echoed close. A rope was dangling from far up at the top.

Jerry leaped for it before he recalled the condition of his arm. In the excitement of the encounter he had forgotten that the arm was still in no shape for a long hand-over-hand climb.

"I can't make it," he said, and looked about quickly. There were baskets of fungus growth, already dried from the heat of the mid-day sun that had shone where it grew. He dragged one to the narrow part of the tunnel. Winslow tugged at another and threw it up as a barricade. A chalk-white figure in copper sheathing was clambering upon it as he worked at another of the nets.

Jerry let go the fiber basket he was dragging and drew his knife as he sprang to meet the assault. A sharp cutting edge was unknown to these workers in copper. Jerry slipped under the raised bludgeoning

copper weapon to plunge the knife into a white throat. Then, without a look at the body he helped Winslow, struggling with another load.

They completed the barricade. A heap of fungus made a raised place where Jerry leaped. Commanding the top of the pile that blocked the choked throat of the passage, he was ready for the next figure that leaped wildly up.

It would take them a while, Jerry saw, to learn of this scintillant death that struck at them from close quarters. His knife flashed again and again as he took the men one at a time and let their limp bodies roll back to the passage beyond.

The assault was checked when Jerry shouted to his companion. "Tie the rope around me," he ordered, "up under my arms ... then you go on up. When you get there pull up—and for the Lord's sake pull fast!"

"Go on," he shouted. "I can hold them for a while—" He turned swiftly to take a leaping body upon the red point of his knife.

He felt the rope about him as he fought, knew by its twitching when Winslow started the long climb, and prayed dumbly for strength to hold his weak fortress till the other could hoist himself up to the top.

He was fighting blindly as they came on in endless succession, the figures of frenzied priests leaping grotesquely beyond. Only the strategic position he had taken allowed him to turn the wild assault again and again. They could only reach him by ones and twos, but the end must come soon. There were priests tearing at the foot of the barricade.... The cold winds that came down from above revived him, but it helped the figures ripping at the fiber cords. The dry fungus fragments whirled gaily away and down the passage in the wind.

The wind! The draft was blowing from him, directly upon his attackers. Jerry struggled and clinched with another that bounded beside him, and knew as he fought that a weapon was at hand. His knife found the lower edge of copper, and the figure screamed as he rolled it down the slope. He slipped the knife into his left hand as he fumbled with his right.

His precious matches! He struck one on the rock; it broke in his trembling fingers. Another—there were so few left. He drew it with infinite care on the surface of rock. The figures below tore in frenzy at the weakening barricade, while yet others stood waiting at this sign of some new form of magic.

They shouted again, as they had when, those long days ago, he had lighted a cigarette before their horrified gaze. Jerry shielded the tiny blaze in his hand to bring it beneath a papery leaf beside him.

The flame flashed and dwindled. He dared not drop back to set fire to the base of the heap. But even in the exhaustion and strain of the moment Jerry Foster still knew the value of the showman's tricks in reaching the fears of these white-faced fighters.

With grandiloquent gesture he raised another of the tindery fragments and ignited it from the first. Another, and he had the beginning of a fire. He lit another piece, and, when he had it blazing, dropped it behind him and kept on with the show.

A large piece became a flaming torch, and he waved it before him and laughed to see the warriors cringe. A cloud of smoke was billowing about him—he leaped to safety through a rising wall of flame.

The rear slope of the barricade became a furnace; the wind behind him swept the smoke clouds down the passage. He heard, and sank back weakly on the ground as it came to him, the screaming riot where a mob of terrified warriors fought and struck to turn the horde that clamored behind them and pushed them on. The blast roared over the heaped fuel and poured downward from the crest. The noise of the retreat went silent in the distance.

Spent and exhausted, Jerry Foster lay panting upon the stone floor. The breath of cold and life came down the long shaft from the crater. Had Winslow gained the top? Was he equal to the climb? Jerry hardly felt the jerking of the rope about his shoulders, but he knew as, in frantic haste, it drew him scraping up the long side of the shaft.

The biting cold above revived him, and again a scene

of desolation was spread before his eyes. Winslow fumbled with the knots and released him from the rope.

"Come on!" he shouted, and extended a helping hand as they leaped and raced across the rocky floor.

Jerry again was vividly, strongly alive as the cold winds swept him. He leaped hugely through the whirling wisps of dried out vegetation—the sun had stripped the surface of every living thing. Again the rocky slopes rose naked in the rosy light of evening. The sun was hidden below a distant range of jagged hills. The long night was begun.

"You're going the wrong way," Jerry shouted. "We left it over there." He stopped to point where the sun had set. "See, that's where we fought the beasts—"

"Come on!" repeated Winslow. "Hurry! We mustn't lose out now. I flew the ship over this way while I was up here before."

A ridge of rock cut off the view where Winslow

pointed. "Bully for you!" Jerry shouted and turned to follow. They stopped as the slope ahead, from its multitude of honeycomb caverns, erupted men.

The priests were ahead, and behind them swarmed their men. Vindictive and revengeful, the wily enemy was fighting to the end. The two stopped in consternation.

"What's the use!" demanded Jerry. His voice was tired, utterly hopeless. "And the ship's right over there...."

"A million miles away," said Winslow slowly, "as far as we're concerned." The army was sweeping down the long slope: they had found their quarry. There were other figures, too, pouring from the throat of the volcano—white, naked figures that swarmed in growing numbers and rushed across upon them from the rear.

"Trapped," said Jerry Foster savagely, "and we almost made it." He rose wearily to his feet. "We'll take it standing."

The armored warriors were approaching; in leaping triumph they raced to be the first ones at the death. The shouts of the priests were ringing encouragement in their ears.

But the leaders from the rear were nearer. One deep breath Jerry drew as he turned to meet them. Then stared, astonished, as the figures swept past. They streamed by in confusion. They were armed with rocks, with clubs or copper metal—some even carried bars of gold above their heads. They came in a great swarm that swept past and beyond them. And they met, like an engulfing wave, the bounding figures of the men in copper. Smothered and lost were the warriors in the horde that poured increasingly on.

The wave, before Jerry's eyes, swept on over the crest, while he still stood in amazed unbelief at the battle that raged.

It was Marahna who brought understanding. He turned to see her kneel in sobbing, thankful abasement at his feet.

Marahna! Her people! She had saved them! There was time needed for the full force of the truth to banish the hopeless despair from his heart. Then he stooped to raise the crouching figure with arms that were suddenly strong.

The pale rose light of the departed sun above shone softly within a rocky valley of the moon. It tipped the tall crags with lavender hues, and it touched with soft gleaming reflections a blunted cylinder of aluminum alloy.

The valley was silent, save for the hushed whispers of wondering thousands who peopled the enclosing hills, and the rushing roar from the cylinder itself where the inventor was testing his machine.

There were figures in priestly robes—scores of them—and they were surrounded by a white throng that, silent and watchful, held them captive.

Beyond, in the open, where bare rock made a black rolling floor, there were two who stood alone. The golden figure of a girl, and beside her, Jerry Foster, in

wordless indecision.

Behind him was the ship. Its muffled thunder came softly to his unheeding ears. He looked at the girl steadily, thoughtfully.

Gone was all trace of her imperious dignity. The Princess Marahna was now all woman. And Jerry, looking into her dark eyes, read plainly the yearning and adoration in their depths. The Princess Marahna had forgotten her deference to the god in her love for the man. The tale was told in her flushed face, openly, unashamed.

And his gray eyes were thoughtful and tender as he gazed into hers. He was thinking, was Jerry Foster, of many things. And he was weighing them carefully. His hand clasped and unclasped at something safely hidden in his pocket. He had taken it from his pack; he had wanted something for Marahna, something she would treasure.

And now she was offering him herself. He could take her with him, take her to that far-off world that she

never dreamed existed. He could show her the things of that world, its wonders and beauties. He could train her in its ways. He would watch over her, love her... And she would be miserable and heartsick for the sight of this awful desolation. He knew it—he told himself it was the truth—and he hated himself for the telling.

The voice of Winslow aroused him. The inventor had come from his ship. "We had better be starting," he said.

The slim figure of the girl in her robe of pure gold trembled visibly. She knew, it was plain, the import of the words. She spoke rapidly, beseechingly, in her own tongue. The words were liquid music in the air. Then, realizing their impotence, she resorted to her poor vocabulary of their own strange sounds.

"No!" she said, and shook her head vehemently. "No—no!"

She motioned to wait, and she called loud and clear across the silence to her own people. There was a stir

about the priests. One in the robes and head-dress of the high priest was brought forward, led by two others of her men. They stopped a few steps from her and bowed low.

Again she called, and the leaders among the vast throng came, too, and made their obeisance before her.

She turned then to Jerry. And now it was Marahna, Princess of the Moon, who stood quiet and poised before him. The light, he saw, made soft wavelets of radiance in her hair, and her eyes were still glowing and tender. She stepped forward toward the priest.

The helmet of the sun god was upon his head. It marked him, Jerry knew, as the master of their world. True, they had bowed in submission to that other master, whose vile head lay horrible and harmless on the floor of the great hall—they had believed in the commands the priests had pretended to receive from him—but this emblem on the helmet marked the leader of the race, the master of this world, for these simple folk.

Marahna reached her slim hands and lifted the thing of gold. She turned, and held it above the startled eyes of Jerry Foster, and she placed it upon his head with all the dignity that became a queen. A word from her, and the men before him dropped in humbleness to the ground. The Princess Marahna was among them in honoring salutation to their king.

Jerry was beyond speech. Not so Winslow. "It looks to me," he said dryly, "as if you were being offered the kingdom of the earth—I mean the moon. Think it over, Jerry—think it over."

And Jerry Foster thought it over, deeply and soberly. He could rule this people, he and Marahna, rule in peace and quiet and comfort. He could bring them knowledge and wisdom of infinite help; he could make their new civilization a measure of advancement for a whole race. He could teach them, train them, instruct them. And he and Marahna—there would be children who would be princes born—could be happy—for a time. And then ... and then he would be old. Old and lonely for his kind, hungering and longing for his own people. As Marahna would be on earth, so would he

be here....

His decision was formed. And with it he knew he must not hurt the heart of Marahna. She loved him, Jerry Foster, the man. He must leave her as Jerry Foster, the god, child of the sun. He stood suddenly to his full height, and who shall say that for a moment the man did not approach the stature of divinity—for he was wholly kind.

He placed a hand upon the head of the kneeling girl before him. He held her in her submissive pose, then, turning to the waiting men, he spoke in measured tones.

"I thank you," he said, and the words came from a full heart, "but my place is not here. I leave with you one more worthy."

Before their wondering gaze he removed the glowing circlet from his head; he leaned to place it on the head of Marahna, humbled before him. With strong hands he raised her to her feet. His look, so tender yet reserved, was full of meaning. She followed his

every sign.

He waved once toward the sun, hidden behind the distant hills: he pointed again to Winslow and himself and to their shining ship: and again he marked the going of the sun. His meaning was plain—these children of the sun must return to their far-off home.

He turned now to Marahna. In his hand was the object he had taken from his pack. It was a treasured thing, this locket of platinum on its thin and lacy chain; it had been his mother's, and he thought of her now as he opened the clasp to show his own face framed within the oval. His mother—she had worn this. And she would have approved, he knew, of its disposal.

Gravely he faced Marahna. He showed her the picture within the case, then held it aloft where all might see. He closed it and taught her the pressure that released the spring. Then, with gentle dignity that made of the gesture a rite, he placed the chain about the neck of Princess Marahna—Queen, now, of the People of the Moon. And he knew that he gave into her keeping

their only relic of a being from the sun. It marked her beyond all future question with a symbol of mastery. And it made of him a god.

And even a queen may not aspire to such an one.

It was well that Winslow's hand was there to guide him as he walked with unseeing eyes toward the ship.

Time may lose at times all meaning and measure—moments become timeless. It seemed ages to Jerry Foster when Winslow spoke in casual tones. "I'm going straight up," he said, above the generator's roar. "Then we'll swing around above the other side. We'll follow the sun—make the full circle of the moon before we start."

But Jerry neither thought nor heard. His eyes were close to a window of thick glass. Below him was a shrinking, dwindling landscape, wind-swept and desolate.

There was a multitude of faces, turned worshipping toward the sky. On one, who stood apart in tiny

loneliness, his vision centered. He watched and strained his aching eyes until the figure was no more. Only the pale rose of a dying sun, and a torn, volcanic waste that tugged strangely at his heart.

"Yes," he answered mechanically, "yes, we'll go round with the sun ... a couple of sun gods."

He laughed strangely as he regarded his companion.

If Winslow wondered at the weariness in the voice he made no sign. He was busy with a rheostat that made thunderous roaring of the blast behind their ship: that swung them in a sweeping arc through velvet skies, away from the far side of the moon, to follow the path of the setting sun—homeward bound.